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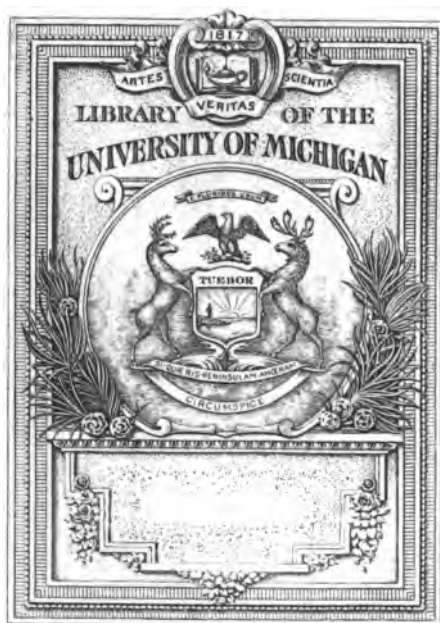
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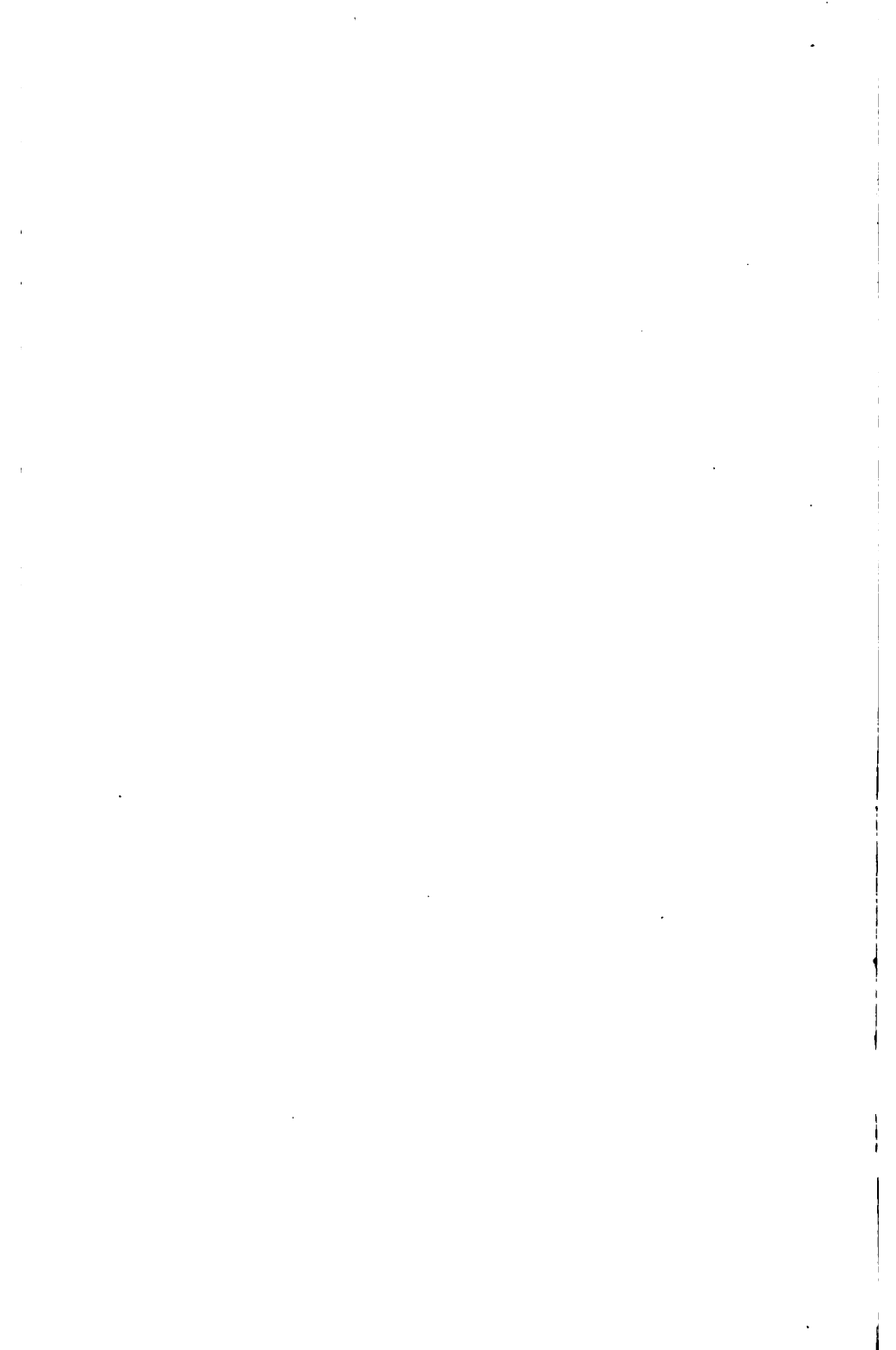
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THE LETTERS OF ONE

THE LETTERS OF ONE

A STUDY IN LIMITATIONS

BY

CHARLES HARE PLUNKETT

*"Courage, poor heart of stone!
I will not ask thee why
Thou canst not understand
That thou art left for ever alone."
Tennyson's Maud.*

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THE LETTERS OF ONE

INTRODUCTORY

[Extract of a letter from Miss Mary Palliser to Mrs. Dalglish.]

April 8, 1906.

. . . Now I am going to tell you a curious story which I have come across lately. I know one of the people concerned—the woman—pretty well; the man I have just seen, perhaps three or four times; you do not know either of them, and they do not live in this neighbourhood, and the whole thing happened last year, so that you will have a nice wide field for conjecture.

The woman is, I suppose, about twenty-nine, but she is one of the people who don't look any particular age;—the sort of woman who is thought to be older than her age when she is young, and younger than her

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age when she is old. She is tall, stately, not exactly beautiful, but very fresh-looking, with a lovely complexion and fine brown hair—rather *richly coloured* altogether; she has got large, kind, wide-open eyes; she is extremely self-possessed and serene; not exactly clever—I never heard her say a clever thing—but still just the kind of woman whom clever people like to talk to, because she seems to understand; indeed, it is very tempting to talk to her about oneself, because she gives you her whole attention, and does not seem to want to cap what you tell her by something of the same kind, only rather more interesting, that has happened to herself. She has a great many friends, but she does not make her friendships in a feverish, fanciful sort of way; they grow slowly, and broaden out; you feel you can trust her absolutely, and that she would never *hand anything on*. She is certainly one of the kindest people in the world. Then, too, she is very well off. She was an only child, and her mother died many years ago; she has lived ever since

with her father, a mild, polite, tame old man, who never seemed to have anything particular to do, and to whom she devoted herself, as it is called. I think he thought a good deal about his health in a leisurely way; but he was kind too, and the house was always full of people. He died about three years ago, and left her everything. She has a delightful house in the country, with no land to speak of, but with large gardens, and a few fields and woods round it; and she has quite a large income. She decided to live on there, and got an old aunt to come and settle with her. She is very fond of her garden, does a great deal in the parish, and is very sociable in a quiet sort of way; quite the last person in the world, in fact, whom you would expect to do anything *odd*, because she seems almost oppressively sensible; and yet that is not quite fair, because she is never shocked at anything, and is not at all conventional or worldly.

The man, as far as I can make out, was of the usual public-school and University

type. He had a little money to start with, but he lost it somehow, and took to journalism and writing books; he has published one or two novels, which are supposed to be clever, but have had no sale. You know the kind of books, full of situations which one does not grasp, and incomprehensible people, who come and go, and make spasmodic remarks. You are never sure who is talking. He is not quite an ordinary man to look at; he is handsome, melancholy, languid. Sometimes he is quite amusing, sometimes unutterably bored.

I can't make out exactly what happened; it is like something in one of his own books! He wanted to marry her, I believe; and she would certainly have married him; indeed, I think that she cared for him very much, though I don't think she was exactly what *we* should call in love with him; but she admired him greatly, and pitied him even more; and he is the kind of man for whom his friends feel rather responsible. Well, the thing hung on for some time; he was often there, and they seemed to be

quite devoted. Then he suddenly disappeared. I gather that he could not make up his mind whether he wanted to marry her or not, and yet wished to feel that he could if he chose. Now I understand she has thrown him over ; and I hear to-day that she is likely to marry some one else.

The odd thing is that she allowed the affair to go on for so long ; of course, one may say that it was rather undignified—but she could not be undignified if she tried. I believe myself that she had a kind of motherly feeling about him, and looked upon him as a clever and unhappy boy—he is at least two years younger than herself—whom she could have made happy ; but the fact that she had everything in the world, while he had nothing, complicated matters rather. He is the type of romantic man to whom the fact that he would have gained everything by marrying her would have been a strong argument against marrying her ; while if she cared for any one, she would have taken a good deal of trouble to show that her position made no difference ;

but I think there is something more behind, because there was no quarrel between them ; in fact, all the months that he never came near her, he was writing to her constantly ; and he went off in this uncomfortable way, just as every one was expecting their marriage to be announced.

It is an odd story, because she is one of the most loyal people I know, and would never throw her friends over for anything that they might do or say ; and I could see, too, when I saw her last, that she was unhappy about it, though she never betrays much emotion—which made it the more marked.

It is the queerest story altogether. I am told that he is hopelessly upset by it all, and has been very ill ; but there is no doubt that she is well rid of him ; he is the kind of man who would have endless moods and fancies ; you would never be sure what he might say or do ; but that is the very thing which would be an attraction to her. I believe that she would actually have enjoyed looking after him, and explaining

him to other people, and standing between him and the world ; there are a good many women like that. Of course, one could understand it if he was really a genius, but he is rather the sort of man who you feel could do a good deal if he tried, but would have numbers of high-minded reasons for not trying.

I don't know quite why I am so much interested in the whole business. I feel very angry with him, because she is really a very fine creature ; one of the few of whom one can say that she is a thoroughly good woman, without implying that she is either parochial or disagreeable. The pity is that she ought to be married, and yet she is not the type of woman with whom men fall in love ; and so I hope very much that the other rumour is true, and that she is going to be married to some one else. I don't know him, but he is quite a nice sort of man, I believe ; something in the Army. . . .

THE LETTERS

I

4, Russell Road, Leeds,
April 24, 1905.

YOU ask me why I have not been to see you for so long. Well, I have made up my mind to tell you frankly, and perhaps the result will be that this will be my last letter to you. Dear, I cannot—I will do anything in the world you ask me, except see you! I will write to you as often as you like, daily if you will. I would make any sacrifice of money and convenience at your bidding. You are not likely to tell me to do this, but I will give you an absurd instance, as it comes into my head. Do you remember the little yellow flower that grows so thickly in the chinks of the ruined wall above Kynance Cove? I am here hard at work, engaged all day long, but if you gave

me no reason for your wish, but merely said that you wanted me to gather one of those flowers, and bring it you, I would go off, ill as I am, travel through the day and the night, pick the flower in the haggard morning, and return through the day and the night, amply content if I could but please you. You who know my indolent and sedentary habits of life, my narrow resources, will realize that it would not be an easy thing for me to do, but you may try it if you will, and I shall never accuse you of caprice. That would be perhaps a small matter. Well, you told me of the miserable and disreputable life that your poor cousin is leading in Melbourne ; if you asked me to do so, I would go off there to-morrow, I will not say cheerfully, but readily, find him out, bring him back, look after him, make myself responsible for him ; you know what a strain that would be for one of my timid and fastidious respectability ; and you know too that it would entail my giving up the precarious position which I have won so hardly : but I would do it without a

murmur. You will think that I am selecting things that I can trust you not to ask, and you will say that when you ask me just to come and see you, as I pass through London, a thing which you might ask any friend to do, I refuse rudely and perversely. It is so! But it is not rudeness nor perversity. How can I put into words what I feel? It is very difficult—I will try to be bold and sincere. The truth is that I love you too well, and dare not love you more nearly. You have too potent an effect upon me. If I yielded to the intoxicating pleasure of seeing you, there is nothing that you could not make me do. I should probably beseech you to marry me, and there are a hundred reasons against that—my health, my poverty, my temperament. In one sense of course I desire it, as a man dying of thirst desires water. The mere mention of it brings up in my mind a whole series of delicious pictures, which I do not and cannot thrust out of my mind. But it would be the worst thing that could befall us. You know it yourself, and yet you are

so compassionate, so romantic, that you would run the risk. I will not. I will save you and myself from ourselves.

I am not made for marriage, and you are not made for marriage with me—the wear and tear of life, the daily intercourse, the anxieties, the fixed engagements, would make havoc of our love. I am not capable of much in the way of hate, but I think I should be capable of coming to hate a wife. The sense of a singular peculiar lasting relation, not in the region of emotion only—I could hold to that—but in the social and domestic region, it would torture me to death. All the things which now are a perpetual delight to me, the way you move and speak and look, because they are all sweet and mysterious secrets, would be secrets no longer. Do not command me to see you. I am not strong enough to resist; and I want you to do more than not urge it. If you met this letter with silence, I should torture myself day and night with wonder as to what you were feeling; and then I should petition you for an interview. I

want you to be your generous and nobler self, and say to me, firmly and joyfully, that you agree, and that we had better not meet—I was going to say “meet no more,” but I cannot bear to think that—but not meet until things have shifted somewhat, till the passion that awoke, in those days that I cannot forget, sleeps again. I have a further and a weightier reason, but I am too tired, too ill, too miserable to write more now ; all must depend upon the answer you send me to this fevered letter, the work of a suffering head and a weary hand. How horrible you would think the room I write from, a back room in a row of suburban houses—but there is a tree here outside my window which seems to-night, in moonlight and breeze, to remember the forest company from which it is sprung. In its sordid exile, it dreams of the pine-clad ridge, the cool night wind, the grassy wood-ridges ; it is like myself, the pioneer of civilization. In another age, under other circumstances, we two could have come together ; but my sad inheritance, and

conventionality, and progress, have made me what I am—a thing too weak for the complex world. You will remember, will you not, that you are not dealing with one who is healthy, indifferent, robust, but with one who is sensitive, weak, disorganized? I have often thought you do not realize my weakness; but you will be merciful, dear, to one who loves you too well for his own peace of mind!

II

4, Russell Road, Leeds,
April 28, 1905.

You do not understand, I see. But I am grateful, deeply grateful for the kindness of your letter—its justice, its compassion. You say you cannot judge me without hearing my other reasons for what, I see, seems to you perverse behaviour. Well, I will give you my further reasons. The one deep and consistent purpose of my life is my art. Do not smile at that! You know my scanty and halting performance, my failures, my paltry successes. But it is the deepest thing I have, and I must follow the light as well as I can. I cannot let anything come in the way of my hopes. You will say, "What are your hopes?" Well, I hope to write, I will not say a great book—for a book can only reflect the greatness of

its creator, and I am far from great—but a perfectly sincere, human, true, tender book. You will say, “What can you gain by that?” I do not know; but it is the fiercest, strongest, deepest impulse I have. I do not desire fame, I do not hope for recognition, as it is called. But I must, before I leave this troubled world, if time is given me, make a monument of my poor self, of my suffering, ardent, longing heart. I muse, the fire kindles, and I must speak.

Four years ago, when I was travelling in the East, we used sometimes to pass by the roadside little heaps of stones. My Arabs used to make excuses to stop, and hunt for a while for a stone to add to the pile. I used to ask them why they did it, or what the pile commemorated. “Something bad happened here,” was all the answer I could get. They were the graves, I afterwards learned, of wayfarers, who died or were slain by the way. Their history, their names, their very date have perished; some of the piles must be hundreds of years old; but the human memory remains. How one

longs to be remembered by other hearts! and even if one is to be unknown, if one's life and fate is to be forgotten, one still desires that a human heart should stop for a moment to send a tender thought into the dark. It is this that I feel. You will not understand that! You are too vital, too full of interests and affections. You will say, "Let me live and love, and the future must take care of itself." Here again we are different.

Besides, I have the desire to make and create something. I suppose that in people like myself, in whom the intellect has absorbed the strength of the body, and even the strength of the heart, I have the same longing to make and to leave behind something beautiful that a woman has to have a child of her own. I do not defend it, I cannot find good reasons for it; but the instinct is there, overpowering and resistless.

That being so, I feel that I cannot let anything sweep across my life which should render that impossible. If my life was joined with yours, that impulse would fade

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away ; it would be like a stream that loses itself in the desert sand. My love for you, which is the deepest thing I have, deeper than even that constraining impulse to create, has helped me and will help me yet to accomplish my purpose ; but my love must be a pure, a spiritual love—were we nearer, you would sweep me away, you would bear me down, as the mermaid in the great picture of Burne-Jones bears the drowned man down, among the clear eddies, in the pebbled sea-cleft. She looks in his pale face, she sees his closed eyes, his fallen cheeks ; his expiring breath floats up in glittering bubbles. She wonders why he cannot love her. Even so would my own life expire in your clasp.

Now that I have written this down, it seems so selfish, so hard ; but it is not so. Your view is of course that I am throwing away the best and most beautiful things of life for a faded dream ; you know how little I am capable of, how poor a thing my best is. You cannot even conceive what my hope, my purpose is.

Let me put it differently. A man who is a consecrated priest of the Church, whose true life is to multiply spiritual forces, to absolve, to bind and loose—there is no question with him of how deftly and cleverly he does his work, how delicately he questions, how impressively he warns, how solemnly he performs his functions. However clumsily and awkwardly he does it, it is still his work. He may laugh with others, he may eat and drink and be merry, he may hanker after forbidden pleasures, but his consecration is the one vast momentous fact in the world, and he dares not be faithless to that. My life is like that—I am called and set apart; and I dare no more link myself to the world again, than the priest dare make a mockery of the holy sacrifice. I may be conscious of infirmity of will, of lack of skill; but that makes no difference to my vocation. I have surrendered other worldly advantages to it—I might now be comfortable, at ease, wealthy. But I do not regret my sacrifice; and now I have to make the supreme sacrifice of love. You will say that we are sent

into the world to live, to make relationships, to love. Other men may be, but I am not ; and to turn aside to human love would be to deny my creed.

And then perhaps you think that the one thing I need to cure my essential coldness is a strong human love. You believe that the reason why my art is both impotent and ineffective is that I cannot, from lack of experience, interpret the vital secrets of life ; but that is not so. Love would absorb me utterly, and swallow me up for a time, and then would come the bitter disillusioning of which I spoke before. Of course other men have lived and loved prodigally and lavishly, and have been artists as well. I know it, and I envy them ; but my own spirit and vitality are very slender ; and I have not strength for both life and art.

Forgive me, dear ! I want not a kind acquiescence, but a complete and willing agreement. I want you to give me comfort and help, for I am sorely in need of both.

III

4, Russell Road, Leeds,
May 2, 1905.

I AM still in hopes that I may persuade you. Let me tell you a story. I was discussing the case of a friend of mine the other day with a wise priest of my acquaintance. The friend is a painter, and after being successful for a while, he is falling in to the shadow, because he will not compromise. He has had many offers of commissions, but he will accept nothing except what he genuinely likes. He has refused to paint portraits of people whose faces do not inspire him ; and when he does paint them, he will take no advice or hint ; he will treat them exactly as he thinks fit ; he will select the accessories he likes, and then he sets to work to paint his sitter's soul, as he can discern it—the result has

been that he has given offence, is considered a perverse and wrong-headed man, and is now confronted with hopeless poverty.

The priest said that he had made the mistake of feeling the responsibility to himself and to his own ideals too ardently—that he ought to fall in more with the wishes of his clients, and that it is a more beautiful and artistic thing to do that—to interpret and refine the unrefined subject, the adverse conditions—that this would be more deeply artistic. Of course that principle might be sophistically applied to degrade art into the pursuit of mere success, but I think the priest is right.

He says too, and this is a true and deep saying, that artists make a mistake in holding up, so to speak, the shield of their own ideals and perceptions against the will of God, instead of going where He would have them go. The painter, I should add, is a deeply religious man, and accepts his ill-success in a spirit of solemn resignation, as the chastening of God. But the priest says that this frame of mind ought to be applied

only to inevitable calamities ; and that one does not learn the truth by taking what is only the natural result of one's own perversity and imprudence and wilfulness as the guidance of God. One should try, he says, to change one's self ; not to hold fast in a Pharisaical frame of mind to one's own chosen ideals.

Now, why do I tell you this story, when it seems to apply to me and to refute me at every point ? It is because I wish to meet the most serious and deepest arguments that can be urged against me. May it not be true that I should find my real self best by giving up my adopted self ? Is it not by abnegation of my cherished hopes that I may find the very peace of which I am in search ? May not God be trying to heal and save me through love, and am I not perhaps holding up my own pitiful will against the arrows of His spirit ? Alas, I do not think so. One of the deepest of all difficulties is the choosing of one's course, when the two paths that are open seem both to be indicated by God. One can only

choose what seems to be the higher. Here it is not a choice between a good course and an evil course. That to which my heart and body alike urge me, to fly to you at once, and to lose myself in love, is a beautiful and a natural course. The other, to live solitary, to give myself to my chosen work, is harder—no, it is not harder, because I cannot do otherwise! I may be making a great mistake, I may be throwing away the sword and choosing the scabbard. But I do not wish you to think that I have not tried to look into the heart of the matter. Indeed I have made a miserable attempt to believe that, if I were to do what seems to me infinitely sweet and gracious, to run to you like a frightened child, I should be doing what is right. But I cannot—the grim purpose stands up cold and bare, like a crag among woodlands, and bids me with an austere sureness of conviction to climb and climb. I am not stopping my ears or hardening my heart. Give me the credit for that; but I cannot yield.

IV

Leeds, *May* 6, 1905.

DEAR, I have explained too much. I should have known better. Nothing in the world is ever done by explaining. If one is dealing with those whom one loves, it is best to say nothing—the secret escapes one ; it is read as surely as one sees the hue of the violet and perceives its scent. One walks in the copse full of other thoughts, absorbed, hungry, impenetrable ; and as one turns out on to the road, some Ariel-like thought plucks one by the sleeve, “Surely there were violets there, and you passed unheeding.” Yet the soul knew it well enough, and was comforted in its drought.

I say, I will explain no more, and yet I know I shall explain a hundred times over. How like you, how like a woman, to draw

me on to explain! How unlike a man-friend! "Oh, cut it short!" he says, with a smile, in which you see the tears lurk; he wants the thing itself, not the drama. Yet I love you better for the difference.

V

Leeds, *May* 9, 1905.

I ENJOYED your letter very much—but please do not in the future waste any time in your letters in inquiries after me and my occupations : waste any time, I say ; because what I want to know about is yourself, so please give all the time you can spare for writing, to telling me what *you* are doing and thinking of. You always complain that you are not a ready writer, that your pen is a drag on your thoughts. Of course I am just the reverse ; my thoughts are slow, my pen is facile. I will not say that it writes a word before I have thought it, but it very nearly does. I shall do the same ; I shall just try to give you exactly what is going through my mind, photograph the mood : do not be surprised or distressed

if my letters seem egotistical—I can't *talk* easily about myself, it seems so pompous ; and do not think either that, when I write about myself, it is a specimen of my hourly and daily thoughts. I dare say I should think a good deal about myself if I had time ; but I have not the time—there is my work, there are my calls at the office, interviews, reading, and so forth ; to say nothing of my thoughts of you ; you would be touched, if not pleased, to know how much time goes in that. But I shall write quite deliberately about myself, for if we are to be perfect friends, you must know me better than you do ; and my letters will be confessions, confidences ; I do not wish to appear other than what I am. It is a bold experiment, and perhaps will be the end of our friendship ; but I do not want to be friends on any other terms. .

VI

Russell Road, Leeds,
May 12, 1905.

Now I must say that you are not to think of me as unhappy. I am launched in my magic boat, and I am well occupied in managing the tiny gear, in steering, in seeing the little prow cut the blue hissing waves. My day goes thus. A letter or two, a little business, a glance at the paper. Then work, like an unbroken voyage, till the keel grates upon the sand. The punctual and economical spirit knows to a second when it has done enough. Then I walk alone, happy if I have the energy to escape to the moors, and see the wider world. If not, well, the town suffices, on a day when the rain drips, and the low clouds scud along in ragged wreaths. A hundred dramas of life delight me. There is the

old man I have seen fifty times before in the same street. He is stout and rubicund ; and what a pleasure that he should shave himself in that absurd way, leaving a beard on his chin like a square block of tow ! and then his dress ! Where did he get those wonderful clothes, as if cut out of tin ; and the gaiters he wears in the hottest and driest weather ? How thankful one ought to be for anything so grotesque, so settled, so arranged on a plan that long years ago was designed to please a certain eye, or that was considered appropriate to his position ; there is some art about that ! Then there are the prim women that have done their work, and dressed themselves up, and stand at their doors, or peep through the Venetian blinds in the unused parlour. But I like to look at the boys and girls best, the young creatures in whose faces there is seen a sort of delicate and untainted beauty, drawn from some beautiful and hopeful thought of some long dead ancestor, man or woman ; the world, the flesh, the devil have made no inroads as yet. They are unconscious of

their charm, they are occupied wholly in their little busy lives—anxiety and care and bodily desires will cloud all that and sweep it away,—whither? What becomes of all the delicate charm that blooms and fades and dies? Why is the fresh charm of buds and flowers so ethereal, and the later charm of mature foliage and globed fruit so material by comparison? I suppose because the former touches nothing but the heart, and sends out the fragrance of hope and possibility—while the fruit rouses in one the idea of material possession, of sated appetite.

These rows of mean uniform houses, standing for so much dull, monotonous labour, tiresome respectability, conventionality! One ought to be able to see past all that, and to realize that the children born into such houses have all the fresh joy and zest and mystery of life that one had one's self in far different scenes. The childish acceptance of its own home; the settled order which seems as inevitable and old as the universe; the sense that father and

mother, rooms and streets, friends and relations, must have been even so from the beginning of the world; the idea of one's elders as sedate persons without motives and temptations, swayed and poised and rolled as inevitably as the stars. That is what the child feels; and these wonderful little dramas are enacted everywhere and for all.

But it is time for me to return again; and then comes the best and most hopeful work of the day, when the mind has recovered its balance, and the brain is in working order; and then comes a meal in haste, and more work; and then I go tired to bed, and if I am not too weary, I plan more work; but too often I think vaguely of you, how you look and move and speak. I try to picture you in your beautiful house, and in the old fragrant garden, till the thought becomes too sweet to bear.

Why do I stay here, you ask, in these squalid surroundings? Because the hack-work that I do on this horrible paper is what gives me just enough time and liberty

to let me dream a few of my old dreams. I might find something more dignified and congenial? Yes, but that would mean interruption, uprooting, new conditions, a new atmosphere, to which I should get only by degrees accustomed. I think of your love and pity, that would share, I verily believe, all the pleasant things about you with me, even with me!

Do I regret the little share of wealth I once possessed? Yes, I regret my loss of liberty at times. But I cannot hide from myself that I have done better, closer, firmer work, since I had this sordid pressure. Of course, I regret the old pleasant days, when one thought so tranquilly of all one meant to do—and did not do it. I am better here for the present, though I sometimes wonder if I am not disciplined enough. The scent comes back to me of the syringa blooms on summer nights, in the old garden at Linton, where the stream went lapsing past at the end of the walk, and the aspens all shivered together in the evening breeze. How often we sate thus

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together in the silence and the cool. It was there I learnt my peril! I often wonder what it was that lent me control in those days—something kept me back. You were there close beside me; I could have taken your hand in mine, I could have rested my head on your shoulder; and yet it was just in those moments that a cold uneasiness seized me, a sort of fright of I knew not what, that made me speak indifferently and unconcernedly, so that you never guessed—at least I think you did not—how the fire glowed within. Were you too held back? There was nothing to keep us apart. I wonder, I wonder . . . and I grow no nearer to understanding—except that my destiny, my vocation was too strong for me, and kept me back from the sweetness in my reach.

VII

Leeds, *May* 18, 1905.

GOOD God, that I can be so perverse a fool ! To think that you are there, waiting for me, ready to welcome me—that you would smile as I entered, hold out your hand to me, look in my face to see what I needed ; listen, or talk, or sit silent. In such a mood as this, I would come, if you breathed a single wish. Yet I cling to the hope that you will not. When this reaches you, I shall be stronger, able to resist the command—and even if I came, what would be the result ? Here as I sit alone, I can talk to you on paper, as I can talk to my own soul. But if I came, I should be frozen into a chilling egotism, I should guard myself, I should say nothing. “How dull the papers are just now ; one really cannot

read all the debates, and the inquests on the victims of motor accidents, and the mutinies in Russia—Clara has a little boy, did you see that? They are so happy, and old Mr. Field is dead, and has left them half his fortune—there is a new curate here—such a pleasant fellow! Quite an accession!” So we should go on, fencing, fencing. I could say nothing of my book, how it takes shape; still less could I tell you how often and how longingly I think of you. We are strange creatures, you and I. I wonder which of us it is that is so reserved? I think that you are most to blame, for you cannot even talk to me on paper as I can to you. Here you are to me but a smiling figure in my dream, sitting by the shaded lamp, your chin upon your hand; you smile and glance as I speak; but I should be dumb in your presence; here there is nothing but my thought of you, and the accessories of the picture are just what I choose to paint. But when I am with you, I am the prey of all my senses. The doors, the windows, the shadowy corners of the

room, the pictures, the furniture, all press upon my thought. There are people in the house, footsteps on the stair ; a bird sings in the garden, the villagers shout aloud as they go home. All this confuses and dismays me ; the impressions hang like a veil between me and yourself. Your dress, your rings, your shoes, the curve of your hair—all this is a sort of armour behind which you are guarded—yet in my thought I fall before you, you bend over me, your hand is in mine ; if it really happened, I should be chilled, upset, miserable ; when I next saw you, in the cold morning air, I should shiver at the thought that I had thus revealed myself.

Do you understand all this, my dearest ? No, you think it overstrained, imaginative, foolish ; and so it is. Yet if it makes you acquiesce, if it makes you feel that we are better apart, it is well. How could you trust your sails to so fickle and boisterous a breeze ?

VIII

Leeds, *May* 25, 1905.

No, you are right! I will send you no more intemperate letters like my last. Come, how shall I write? You will be glad to hear that my book approaches completion, that I have hopes of a publisher. It is not quite what I had hoped to make it. I have tried to give utterance to intangible things, fugitive thoughts, that run from one's gaze like the little coils and loops that lurk in one's eye, and that hurry swiftly out of the field of sight if one tries to fix them. I shall soon be free to go for a holiday. Where shall I go? I have not thought; and I have the masculine dislike of being forced to say what I shall do. I shall do what pleases my fancy at the moment. I am thinking of the sea somewhere. I long to see great cool clear waves

lashing in foam among the rocks, which are fringed with coarse black weed, brimming the little rock-pools or, better still, the curve of the arching breaker, the thunder and roar, and the thin blanket of foam that runs so swiftly up the sand. There will be cliffs, with fragrant caves; there will be the wreckage of the waves, corks from nets, skates' eggs, broken sea-urchins, bladders of weed, red matted hair of sea-grass, little rounded water-worn shells, glass dimmed and scratched to a gem. Then there are the sand-hills, the smooth yellow slopes, with the green points pricking through; at the edge grow the pale grey-blue sea-poppies; and behind all, the village, with the boats drawn up. I could fill my tired mind there with a hundred pretty things. I could lie on the sand and feel the sun beating on my face; I shall feel like a child again, as I watch the great steamer, hull-down on the horizon, with its cloud of smoke, the red buoy turning its sides in the rollers, the shadowy headlands, one by one.

What part will you play in all this?
Alas! I hope that I shall forget you for
a little ; but as I get stronger and more
full of thought, you will pass like a ghost
along the shore, finger on lip, looking in-
scrutably at me as I lie in the fragrant
breeze.

IX

Leeds, *May* 30, 1905.

NOT "alone"—no, I never said that—I am the last person in the world who could bear isolation; but, on the other hand, I dare not be too close. I could marry, of course, and make a fairly considerate and courteous husband; but I would not willingly marry any one whom I loved. Does that seem to you strange? It is the curse of the artist again, who dreads disillusionment more than he desires fruition; and who must keep the inmost chamber of his heart empty, swept, and garnished, for the art that may enter—if it be not there: for it comes and goes like the wind.

Of course there are many artists who have married, and have made the best of husbands; but then one never knows what

they thought of the marital relation. With some perhaps it meant only inspiring and beautiful companionship ; with some it was a tyrannous desire. Some can keep life and art apart, I suppose. Some can divide their emotion into episodes, and go back to rest in life after a sojourn with art, an arduous quest. Of course the person whom every one would quote would be Browning ; but I don't think Browning was an artist. He was full to the brim of tumultuous ideas ; he enjoyed life, and the stir, the thrill, the emotion, the complexity of life ; it all came bubbling to the lips like a great full-fed fountain—but he was far more concerned with what he had to say than with how he said it. Of course he had a care for the form ; but I imagine that his heavy, rough, tumultuous metres were to him like the beat of the heels of a great horse galloping in a pasture. I am sure that no artist could have written some of the dreadful, incoherent, rough-and-tumble things that Browning wrote ! An old friend of mine, who knew him well, tells me that he talked just as a great, jolly,

full-blooded man of business might have talked, with no selection, no phrasing, no economy, good and bad and second-rate all jostling out together. I am sure he was not an artist, but a *viveur*, who liked words and rhythms as another man might like hunting and shooting. He was, I think, a perfect lover, an adorable husband. I should always respect him for that. Then Tennyson, he of course *was* an artist, but Tennyson's view of other people was like the kindly, tolerant, superior view of an old Caliph at Bagdad. And he married a wife—a very wonderful and true-hearted one too, because he was fortunate in everything—just as he would have had a seraglio if he had been an Eastern potentate. But it is of no use to multiply instances; all I say is that I cannot serve two mistresses. Either art or a wife; either would be enough—but not both. My view of marriage is perhaps fantastic; but I think of it as a supreme and all-pervading intimacy, a task for a life-time, to be taken up like a great vocation, a thing to which

everything in the world must be subordinated ; and a service, too, full of dangers and risks, needing all the faith, and patience, and gentleness, and devotion of which a man is capable, a devotion that can bridge strange rifts and chasms ; for in married life, in that close and awe-inspiring union for all time of two distinct spirits, there must be an appalling revelation of the depths and heights of temperament. I should make discoveries, I doubt not, which would shake me to the base ; I should enter upon it, believing and hoping all things ; and then perhaps I should find strange gaps of continuity, hollow places where I had expected firm ground, high peaks, answering to terrible abysses in my own character. There would be marvellous surprises too, of course ; but one would learn the essential dissimilarities of temperament, and that would be a fearful thing to me, making huge demands upon my faith. Of course if I could take a less exalted view of marriage it would be different ; but the personal abandonment of love, the deep inscrutable

mysteries of it, the consent to what seems lowest in our nature,—it is a terrible thing to seem to cloud the sense of the stainless purity of womanhood ; to learn that that is not impure in the case of one whom one holds highest and best, when one's whole life has been spent in casting away from one's thought the least shadow of desirous impulse. Why, if I may say what I think, the teaching, the example of Christ Himself seems to me to be against marriage. Why, if He was perfect Man, did He not otherwise consecrate the married state by entering upon it? Yet the very thought is a profanation.

Of course this is all very uneasy and casuistical reasoning. The normal man knows what he wants, and goes straight at it, but the torture of all who live in ideas, in intellectual things, is the immense complexity of motive that comes in—the little shadows that flit like clouds across the soul, striking the sunlight out. The fertile mind spends itself in inventing reasons and sophistries and delicacies, all the little wretched

THORNS

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hindrances, like the thorns that catch one's clothes if one goes leisurely through the brake. The normal man plunges through, and tears the thorns out by impact. But it is useless to complain ; one must struggle through as one can.

X

Leeds, *June 4*, 1905.

DEAR, I have hurt you by my letters ; you do not say so, and still less do you say what has hurt you. But I know it only too well. You think I am selfish, absorbed, egotistical. You think I am simply viewing the situation from my own point of view, and that I have no regard for your happiness. It is not so. It is because I am sure that happiness cannot come to us in this way, that I act as I am acting. There would be nothing but misery in store for us, if we agreed to live our lives together. To yield to the craving which besets me all day long, to be with you and near you, would be like flying to any other indulgence for relief, without care for the future. Two or three things come into my mind which might help you. The first is this, that I love you better, more

as you deserve to be loved, in absence, because there is nothing, no physical fret, no accident of life, no interruption, no disagreement to come between us. When I am with you, there are a hundred things that distress me, little sordid things not worth noticing. Perhaps I am overstrained, exhausted, nervous ; then when I am with you I cannot say what I wish ; I am irritable, futile, unstrung. But now, in such dreary moods, I can love you steadily all the time. Then again, when I am with you I am absurdly, wildly jealous. I cannot bear not to have you entirely to myself, and I resent the least interference ; but now I am calm enough ; or my work comes in ; I am torn with the desire to draw out some conception ; the thing shapes itself in the brain ; yet, when I am near you, I dare not lose a moment of your society, while the fret of the brain makes it impossible for me to give you my whole mind. Now, as I work, you seem to sit in the background, smiling and tranquil. I look up and glance, and feel you near.

And then you feel, of course, that if I am giving up my life to my art, I ought to have a greater performance to show. That is unanswerable ; my poor books, so neglected, so contemptuously handled, so far short even of my conception—what are they to weigh in the balance against life and love ?

Think of me, if you can, as of one who loves you truly, but is wedded to a base and shrewish wife. Ought I to forsake her ? On the one side is the call of love, on the other the conventions of society. No, there is something more than that. I wedded her, we will say, with my eyes open. I loved her, or thought I did ; I pledged her my loyalty and my honour. She may have disappointed me, but ought I to think of that ? I may delude myself into thinking that I am made for happiness and deserve happiness. But I know how you would decide. You would say, " Stay, and do your best."

One more word. If we can endure for a little, a few uneasy months, if we can adjust ourselves to the separation, the best and

purest kind of love will succeed ; a friendship in which we can utterly and entirely trust each other, a union troubled by no earthly or worldly anxieties or cares. Day by day I feel that growing up in my heart. The one misery is the thought that perhaps you do not feel it. Such a friendship as that is the best and purest thing in the world ; instead of cutting across and interrupting the service to which one is vowed, it strengthens it, and clarifies it, and makes it holy. Try to think thus of me—I cannot sincerely say that I would have you form other ties, a husband, children—but I shall soon be able to feel even that, and know that your heart will not be withdrawn from me, and yet given to me in a way that will cause you neither pain nor regret.

XI

Leeds, *June 9*, 1905.

SOME men, thus unequally and cruelly mated, have solaced themselves by secret and stolen love. The thought is inconceivable to me. It is not that I take the conventional view of the matter, and condemn what is called disreputable. I care nothing for the opinion of the world in these matters, though one so timid as myself, so sensitive to every hostile wind, feels the slightest chill of hostility or suspicion in the minds of those about him. But if I thought it right thus to steal love, I should so act, only careful to lull the stupid suspicions of the world to rest. But, as I have said, the thought is inconceivable to me; in perfect love, it is the daily and hourly companionship, untroubled by any breeze of conventional suspicion, that matters; we who are

not robust and indifferent by nature, must make our terms with society ; but, as I say, it is the common life which is the potent attraction, the mingling from dawn to eve of interests, thoughts, ideas, and moods. What tranquillity to share one's inmost mood with one whom one perfectly loves ! In such a life as that, love's dearer mysteries take their simple and ordered place ; they are but the foaming cataracts of the stream — interludes of swifter motion, intenser feeling. But it is the clear deep pool, the tranquil river-reach, that I really crave for, where the mingled waters pass brimming on in sunlight and shade. It is this that I sacrifice, in abjuring wedded love. Those who filch the moments of the intenser love seem to me to grasp only at the intoxicants of life—like those who would but meet their friends at revel and banquet. The joys of common life are to share labour and converse, the freshness of the morning, the dewy calm of sunset, when there are no fierce ardours of body and spirit, but temperate and joyful calm. Oh, do not

think that I do not know what I miss ; and if I thought that this life were all, I should catch at its more tumultuous joys ; but I see a shining path that reaches far beyond ; and I cannot help believing that that path may be trod more surely by those who have held back, in life, from the things which are of the earth and of the body. Yet it is through the bodily sense that one loves, alas ; though I feel that we two would have known and clung to each other, in whatever pitiful or deformed bodily disguise we might have made our pilgrimage : for it is nearness of soul that matters. It is not in the gracious words of pleading, in the subtle interchange of beautiful ideas that love is born ; word and glance and smile and embrace are but the symbols ; and if you and I had been born into the world as negroes, bushmen, Esquimaux, with all the sordid accessories that revolt one in such lives, we should still have been drawn unerringly each to each. I know that, and in doing as I am doing, we are but waiting for the time when our spirits can overleap all boundaries.

How transcendental ! a scornful materialist would say. What a pitiful refining upon what is plain and obvious ! But it would be a mere affectation if I pretended it were otherwise ; and I claim you as mine, through the obstacles that my own troubled spirit heaps up—obstacles so far more real and tangible than any that are heaped up by the conventions of the world.

XII

4, Russell Road, Leeds,
June 15, 1905.

I AM but finding lofty and poetical reasons, you think, for not doing what nothing but indolence and selfishness and fear of complications hold me back from. I do not think that is your real thought. It is true that I am weak ; that things which another would brush aside seem to me insuperable. But you know me too well to believe the worst of me. That is again the misery of subtlety that it cannot bear to face the truth, but hides a sordid thought in a tracery of delicate argument. But if you knew to what I am condemning myself, you would know what I am sacrificing. I am acutely sensitive to the sordid ills of life, and here they are heaped up round me. I live in noise and dust and vulgarity, and in what I hate

more than anything in the world—the noisy, cheerful, good-humoured, sensible democracy. I live among people who love healthy stir and interchange of breezy insolence. It pierces me through and through. Here is a tiny instance. I was bicycling yesterday, trying to get some silence and solitude and fresh air. I was working my way up a long hill-road on the moors. A party of gay holiday-making clerks were bicycling up behind me. Just as the party closed in upon me, I alighted to escape them. They alighted too, all round me. They shouted across me to each other—they saw no reason why we should not all walk on together, interchanging familiarities. They thought it a sign of fastidious superiority that I drew apart and halted for them to go on. Their words, their accents, their vile good-tempered phrases, bawled in my ears, hurt me as much as if I had been beaten with a stick. Yet they would have resented my beating them as tyrannical interference. But the fact that I should resent what they happened to like,

seemed to them to be contemptuous and superior. To the democracy, the hope of the race is that all should be robust and good-humoured ; all companionable, enjoying the same full-flavoured jokes and impudent personalities. They have no sense of justice or equality. Their idea of equality is that all differences should be levelled into a cheerful vulgarity. What amuses these healthy persons is the sight of others suffering from small calamities and inconveniences. They are kind enough, no doubt, in real miseries ; and yesterday I saw one of these young clerks comfort a little girl who had broken a jug, and give her a sixpence, which he had painfully earned, to pay for her loss. But the same evening, at a station, some young fellows of the same type laughed consumedly at an old, tired, and bewildered man, who mistook his train, and tried to get into it when it was in motion, only to be swept back by the officials. " Didn't he look wild, neither ? " said one ; and they all roared in concert. Yet it is on this plane of life that I am

forced to live by my choice. So do not say to yourself that my decision costs me nothing—its costs me dignity, silence, quiet, self-respect—things ineffably dear to me.

XIII

Leeds, *June* 20, 1905.

I HAVE escaped for a little from the hateful life. I told you I was negotiating for a book. To my intense surprise I have got no less than one hundred pounds, with a chance of more to come. I have given up, for the present, my journalistic work. I went to the proprietor himself. I told him that I was ill and tired out, and wanted some months of freedom. To my intense surprise he thanked me for my work, and told me that he would be able to take me back at the end of the time. So I have several weeks of liberty before me. I am going to take a lodging in the country, in a farmhouse where I have been before. I shall have some quiet and repose there. I know what I want to try and write; and

there seems no reason why I should not carry it out. I will not say more to-day, as I have my arrangements to make. But you can imagine what this means to me.

XIV

Latchetta, East Hoathly,
June 27, 1905.

I HAVE accomplished the change. You may imagine me, if you will, in an old timbered farmhouse, stone-tiled, with a great brick chimney-stack at either end, and two vast red-trunked yew-trees in front ; I have a big, low-ceilinged, empty room for a sitting-room, and the luxury of two tables, a little one for meals, a big one for papers, so that no shifting is necessary—indeed each side of the table is for an occupation. Here I read, there I write letters, there I scribble reviews, there I make my book. It is four-square, like the new Jerusalem. The whole place is unutterably quiet, wholesome, serene. The sun dances through my casemented panes ; and the good folk have put a great bunch of roses on the table. I

do just as I like, and when I like. I wake early ; I read in bed ; the morning I spend in business, with a stroll ; I dine early, I walk or bicycle in the afternoon,—and this is a land where the interests of the public rather than the interests of landowners are studied ; there are paths everywhere ; quite near the house is a little valley, with a full clear stream, fringed with meadow-sweet and loosestrife, running through water-meadows ; nothing to be seen but hillsides and copses ; nothing to be heard but the clack of a water-mill. I come back after walking, and pounce upon my book, all the more eagerly because I have not laid hands on it all day ; and I work till I am tired. Then I eat a little cold meal laid out for me ; and then work again, or read till I go to bed. I think myself an unutterable fool for not having done this before. The people of the house are silent, good-natured, considerate. They mind their business, and are glad that I mind my own ; we exchange a few sentences in the course of the day with mutual goodwill.

But I forget not Jerusalem in my mirth !
Of course the one thing in the world that I
want is you, to share my life here. What
would I not give if, as I write, I could look
up and be conscious that you were near me !
If it pleases you to know that I think of
you, why, I think of you a hundred times a
day. Yet I am happy too. I am writing
now late at night. The window is open,
the cool breeze comes lingering in; I hear
an owl flute in the copse. Outside the fields
are silvered with the moon, among the dark
thickets; a little mist lies over the stream.
I even dream of you; a day or two ago I
dreamt that you were vexed with me, would
not speak, turned away your head; it
clouded my mind all day long.

XV

Latchetts, July 8, 1905.

WHAT miserable creatures we are! The solitude and quiet of the place are having a bad effect on me—perhaps I am working too hard. I grow depressed. The smallest thing weighs on my mind, the smallest difficulty seems insuperable. I am disgusted with my book, I have stuck in it. I realize the scene and the motive, and my figures will not talk—it is like a stiff, dull party.

Well, we must pay a price for our happiness; and on the whole I am willing to pay the price of a little depression for peace and liberty. When I am at work in town, I am fretful, irritable, peevish, but I am not depressed; there is a cause for my dissatisfaction. But here there is no cause for dissatisfaction at all, yet it is there. I sit listless and unstrung. It does

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want is you, to share my life here. What
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XV

Latchetta, July 3, 1905.

WHAT miserable creatures we are! The solitude and quiet of the place are having a bad effect on me—perhaps I am working too hard. I grow depressed. The smallest thing weighs on my mind, the smallest difficulty seems insuperable. I am disgusted with my book, I have stuck in it. I realize the scene and the motive, and my figures will not talk—it is like a stiff, dull party.

Well, we must pay a price for our happiness; and on the whole I am willing to pay the price of a little depression for peace and liberty. When I am at work in town, I am fretful, irritable, peevish, but I am not depressed; there is a cause for my dissatisfaction. But here there is no cause for dissatisfaction at all, yet it is there. I sit listless and unstrung. It does

not seem worth while to go out; it is not worth while to sit at home. If I were only capable of quiet wholesome indolence, if I could sit half the morning, making a pretence to read, in a garden-chair, I should be content; but I have a restless prompting to work, which will not let me be. Is there no kind of life in which one could be wholly at ease? I do not want visitors; they would weigh on my mind and oppress me. I do not want to have the trouble of making myself understood, of exploring other minds. And yet I want the sense of company. It is pitiful to be so dependent upon stimulus! But I will cure it by endurance. All that is needed is to get used to it. At present my only cheerful moments are when I write thus to you; but I should be unbearable to be with. I could not willingly inflict myself upon any one in these moods. I shall try the experiment of a long day out-of-doors. I will go a long bicycle ride in this incomparable country, and see if I can renew the old sensations, the delicious

weariness, the cleanness and clearness of body and mind, that used to visit me as a boy after a long day among the mountains. The worst of depression is that one never knows whether it means that one wants more activity or more rest. It is extraordinary how little one knows about one's miserable body ! There is an old story of Jowett beginning a sermon in his little piping voice, " By the age of forty, it is said, every man is either a physician or a fool " ; (a pause) " there are very few physicians."

I can write no more to-night ; it is not that I do not want to, but I have nothing to say except dull, disquieted, unhappy thoughts. I will not inflict them on you.

XVI

Latchetta, *July 8, 1905.*

My experiment has been successful. I started after breakfast yesterday. I bicycled, I walked, I sat down; the roads here have a way of wandering up and down among low wooded ridges, by streams and valley-bottoms. There seems no attempt to follow a line, or to fall in with the lie of the ground. I suppose that they represent very old forest-tracks, reaching back into the dimmest antiquity. And I have no doubt that the reason why they tend to go up to the tops of little eminences instead of keeping to one plane is that, in old savage days, when men went in peril of their lives from beasts and marauders, one would need to go up to high ground at short intervals, that one might look round and see that the coast was clear.

In the afternoon I came out on a great heathery eminence; I found a little dry sheltered place out of the wind, and I sate there till the sun began to go down. Such a view! On the far horizon were the downs, soft smooth green outlines, full of rich shade; then at my feet ran the great low wooded ridges, ridge after ridge; there were very few houses in sight, but the smoke went up from a little hidden town. I cannot tell you with what a deep and inexpressible emotion I gazed. I cannot analyze the feeling at all. It seems not to be connected with any material sense of possession or prosperity. Partly it was the beauty of colour; partly it was the wide extent of plain and hill; partly too there was the sense of all the little lives that are being lived in the peaceable world, all the work, and care, and gladness, and love; and yet how few of the human beings that creep like insects up and down the hills, in and out of their tiny dwellings, have a sense of the sweetness of it all! I felt as though I were probably the only human heart in the whole

of that great tract that was trying to survey it all, to be thrilled by its beauty, to guess its significance. It seemed to me the purest poetry, and yet poetry that I could not come near to expressing ; for behind it all lay a vast mystery, a profound secret. I seemed for a moment so near guessing it, and then it was withdrawn again, and I prayed loudly and desirously ; or rather I held out my heart to the Father of all, and begged Him to fill it. Of course it all centred upon you. If one single creature could be so infinitely dear, could thrill my heart so deeply as the thought of you thrills me, there must be a very near and intimate love hidden behind it all. God could not create what He does not feel.

I wonder what you were thinking of yesterday at that time—it was between five and seven. I did indeed send out my heart to yours, I bound my messages on the bodiless air ; my love rippled out upon the stillness, hoping that it might encounter some ripple setting from your heart to

mine ; there came a moment when I seemed
to clasp hands with your soul.

I came back glad and weary ; I slept a
deep and child-like sleep ; to-day I am
restored to peace and content.

XVII

Latchetts, *July* 10, 1905.

HERE is a little thought that came into my mind to-day. I have had to use spectacles a good deal lately. They are very tiresome things; but as I sit sideways to the light, I suspend my work, again and again, to see the magical little vignette that forms itself in the glass nearest the light; I see the dark green yew-trees against a space of blue sky. The picture is impossibly, extravagantly beautiful; more beautiful, I think, even than the reality! It is all touched with a silvery radiance; it seems *selected* rather than seen; it has a minute stillness and exactness, even a permanence which defies description. That is the charm of art—it seems to catch a fleeting moment, to represent it, to make it one's own, to save it from the ruinous lapse of beautiful things.

XVIII

Latchetta, East Hoathly,
July 14, 1905.

THERE are different kinds of relationships and communications. I begin to think that I communicate best with my fellow-beings by writing, rather than by speech and sight. After all, sight tells one very little ; one interprets glances, movements, gestures. But to me sight reveals other things as well, imperfections, weariness, sordid physical matters ; that is the curse of being minutely and pathologically observant. The essence of the situation, after all, is the communication of soul with soul, not of body with body ; when one is imaginative, as I am, one can see the person of whom one dreams in full and radiant perfection. I have but to close

my eyes, and I see you, as I like to see you best ; but the outward form distracts and disquiets me ; I cannot be certain of saying what I mean, to a person with whom I am talking. The mood does not fit, or one is conscious of *malaise* : or the talk takes a wrong turn ; or one is ashamed to be absolutely sincere and open. A great musician once said to me that he preferred to read a score rather than to hear music performed ; in his thought, he said, the music was perfect, the intervals were true, he could colour and control it as he would ; but with an orchestra there were mistakes, false notes, omissions, imperfections. I think I am like that. Of course, in a friendship, both people must be able to communicate what they feel in writing ; and your letters have the quality which so few letters have ; they are yourself. I hear you speak in them.

Perhaps this is a very bloodless, limp, passionless theory ; but with myself, to speak plainly, though my moods enter into my letters, my temper, my irritability, my

peevishness does not. If I am peevish as I write, I lay my pen down till I am peevish no longer ; so that, at all events, you have the best of me thus.

XIX

Latohetts, July 17, 1905.

I SAW yesterday, in a stupid, well-meaning book, a remark to the effect that the artist was a man who played for the highest of stakes ; that he was loaded with praise and honour and wealth, if he won ; and if he lost, he was worse than nothing, a feeble and amiable dilettante, who did not even understand his own absurd business.

The man who wrote that sentence has not the least idea what the pursuit of art means. Of course success is a comfortable thing enough, and no one would despise it, if it came, because it means all sorts of good things—credit, respect, and above all, liberty. But, good heavens, that is not the point at all ! I do not expect success for a moment ; I do not even expect attainment of my aims ! What then, you will

ask, do I expect? I expect nothing. It is not, in the case of an artist, having an object at all. One might as well say that a man wished to live, in order that he might breathe. Art is just a part of life, almost a symptom of it. It is as natural and essential for the artist to express himself, as it is for the man to breathe. I do not even aim at improvement. My instinct is only to express the idea as closely, as finely, as intimately as I can. I do not even want to write well, still less to be thought to write well. It is not in that region at all. There is no question of praise about it; recognition is only valuable, when it comes from people who understand, and then only as an indication that the expression of the thought comes near to the thought itself. It is like the case of a teacher with a class. The teacher does not want to be praised for teaching clearly; the satisfaction is the seeing, in the faces and glances and the answers of those whom he is teaching, that he has made the subject clear, has simplified what seemed intricate. It is not

the sense that he has succeeded; it is only the delight that what is perfectly clear to him, is now clear to others as well. But, after all, that simile breaks down, as all similes break down if they are pressed. What I am aiming at is the realizing of an impossible and exquisite perfection, the putting of a thing in the one final and absolute form. There is no distinction really between the form and the idea; one does not have the idea first, and then make the form—the form is there, hidden deep in the mass of human language, as the mass of marble contains the forms not of one but of innumerable statues; one's business is to find it; if the sculptor can but remove exactly the right amount of marble, in exactly the right places, he finds the statue he is in search of; and in writing too, the process is not so much construction as removal. The general outline of the thought is plain enough, encumbered with superincumbent masses and projections of otiose material. The point is to remove exactly the right amount, no more or less. Some-

times one does that easily and lightly, and the form or a part of it, emerges in its fine perfection. Sometimes one works in heaviness and weariness, cutting too deep, or not deep enough. You will wonder where the pleasure lies; and here again most people make an initial mistake. It is hardly a question of pleasure at all. A soldier does not enjoy the hardship of a campaign, the thirst, the weariness, the cold, the aching blistered limb, the deadly risk. But excitement, and fellow-feeling, and duty, and honour carry him bravely along. It does not occur to him to malingering, to desert, to run away; but it is not pleasure, nor the hope of tangible reward that sustains him.

It is as inevitable for me, made as I am, to be an artist, as it is for me to eat and drink and sleep; that is to say, it is instinctive, not deliberate. If I were to settle down to a quiet domestic life, one of two things would happen. Either I should stifle my art, and I dare not anticipate that, or else there would be a daily and hourly

struggle between my art and my life—misery to myself and those near me.

I am afraid that this is a painful and confused letter, but I have tried to disentangle the points of a vast subject ; you will understand it, I am sure. The one thing that I want you to feel is that I am not hoping for success, or even for attainment. It is rather a sort of pilgrimage, but unlike most pilgrimages, there is no certain goal ; sometimes indeed one has a sudden sight, from hilltop or high-standing ridge, of a celestial city, half pearl, half amethyst ; but I do not even know that my way lies thither ; and even if it does, there are many dark valleys and desperate perils in between ; but there *is* a path beneath my feet, and it shows a livelier finer green for a little way into the moorland ; and I must fare onwards, whether I will or no.

XX

Latchetta, *July 20, 1905.*

Do not lose patience with me, dear ; you find my philosophical coldness very unnatural, I know ; but you know that you have the power to break in upon it. I will come at your command ; but I beseech you not to command. The day may dawn when I shall be stronger, braver, more calm ; and meanwhile you know that I would not have you spoil your life for me. I only ask you, as a beggar for alms, for such tenderness and affection as you can spare me ; it is your heart I want, not your life. You must bestow that as you will, even if it means withdrawing your heart from me too ; I would give up my life to you, if you claimed it ; but it would not be for your happiness ; and, believe me, I do indeed think more of that than I think of my own.

I ask you for a sisterly love, and remember that no shadow of blame or jealousy would ever cross my mind if you decided that you need a fuller life. A sister can love a brother none the less, if she takes a lover to her heart ; love is not a single concrete thing that, like a ring, can be worn by but one beloved at a time. If I were sure that our love could be sisterly and brotherly, I would fly to meet you—but I cannot answer for myself ; and from a nearer love I am held back. I have said it so often that I fear to weary you ; but my life must be given to my art—poor, slender, haggard, tattered bride—as St. Francis' was given to poverty. And in saying this, do not think that I am under any illusion as to what I can do for art. I do not hope to triumph, or even to succeed ; but only by such devotion as mine can art be served ; and the sorriest knight can bind himself by vows to join the quest after the Holy Cup, even though he fears that his weak and faithless heart, his faltering eye, can never win a sight of what is most dear. Yet even if I fail, and fail most

miserably, the veil may be withdrawn just as I close my swimming eyes upon the world. It may be a wandering fire that I pursue, who can tell? But I must not be disobedient to the Heavenly Vision.

XXI

Latchetts, July 24, 1905.

YES, you are right; you touch the weak spot in my pleadings when you say that the Fellowship of the Knights had at least the brotherly tie, the noble companionship. I have no friend among artists; I am miserably alone. The great knights of art cannot condescend to notice one who is as the kitchen-knave, bound apprentice to the meats and drinks; and such smaller coteries as I have touched the fringe of, are insufferable and poisonous. There is something to me quite unutterably horrible about a set of amateurs, who apply precious terms to each other's faulty work—I should have been welcomed to more than one of these sets, if I could have been insincere. Oh the hollow ugliness of that one coterie into which I was for a little drawn! The finicking

men with their little phrases, their futile essays, their vanities, their sensibilities ! Oh the affected, lustreless, unhealthy women, mistaking hysterical shudderings for emotion, the scented boudoir for the palace of art ! The bad music, the silly drawings, the vapid poetry, the sickening compliments ! Yet it was thus that I grew to know you first, and it was your candour and clear-sightedness and frankness that made me feel the horror of the enervating atmosphere. What am I to do ? I cannot be great, I will not willingly be small. Be natural, you will say ! But how can I be natural except by listening to my nature ? Those who adore simplicity most, are often the most affected. I could hide my weakness from you, could make a parade of manliness ; but the joy of my love for you is that there is at least one ear in the world to which I can whisper what I am ; one eye before the glance of which I need make no concealment. Dear, I speak to you as I speak to God—to you, and to none other. You have but to tell me to hold my peace.

XXII

Latchetts, July 27, 1905.

ONE happiness of writing thus is that we do not share the dust and *débris* of life together, only its golden moments. You will say, perhaps, that I have admitted you to the knowledge of many sordid moments and ugly anxieties. But these things are not ugly and sordid any more when they are faithfully perceived and told. There is no greater mistake than to think that art is concerned only with sweet and delicate things; it is not a question of what is seen and told, but of the atmosphere through which it is seen and told. There is such a thing as realistic art; the only necessity is that the things should be selected, the point of view chosen, and that then all should be faithfully depicted. When I write to you thus, I have chosen and

selected my subject. The misery of life in common is that one lives with the things themselves, not with the ideas of the things. The moment that a thing becomes an idea, that moment it is transmuted and made holy. Do you understand that? It is that which differentiates the artist from the mere *viveur*. There is no phenomenon in the world to which this glorifying process may not be applied. You do it, but you do it unconsciously, while I am horribly and painfully conscious of the process. The unhappy things of life are not necessarily the sorrows, the misfortunes, the pains, the despairs. These various griefs can all feel the transfiguring power of art. The unhappy things are the dull, heavy, lustreless, ugly things; and the greater the artist is, the fewer of these things there are in his life, because he can cast the hallowing ray upon them. There lies my own weakness; my artistic vitality is low, and there are long periods when the inner light is extinguished; and then life is dreary and savourless. That is the reason of my

loneliness. That is at once the cause why I can neither conquer nor submit. I suppose there are few people in the world who bear the penalties of art so heavily as I, and have so little of its radiance.

XXIII

Latchetta, July 31, 1905.

You are vexed, I do not know why, at my dwelling so much upon the thought that it is the idea that matters, more than the thing. Perhaps you do not quite see what I mean by the idea. I will tell you.

A friend of my mother's, a widow, had an only child, a little boy whom she idolized.

She was travelling in Italy with him, when he fell ill, and died the same day. I do not remember the details now, but for some legal reason he was obliged to be buried there in the place; his mother was broken-hearted; she took a house in the town, and spent a large part of the year there, going daily to the grave and adorning it with flowers. Some years after, she wished to move the body to another part of

the cemetery. She got permission from the Government, and the grave was opened ; but the coffin was empty, save for a few stones wrapped up in hay, and no investigations revealed what had become of the body of the child, though there were several painful surmises. It was a terrible shock to the mother, and drove her nearly distracted.

But if the discovery had not been made, her grief would have continued to consecrate and link itself to the spot where she believed her child to be lying, but where he had never lain.

That is a parable of what I mean ; and it is a parable of wider things too ; most of all, it is an allegory of love itself, which is only too often an emotion not produced by the object of one's love, which is merely a symbol, but by an idea, a conception, which exists only in one's own mind. Scientific men have analyzed love, and refer it all to the law of reproduction, on the one hand, and the protective instinct on the other. Yet who that has truly loved would not indignantly deny the suggestion that this

was all ? Love has been so refined and complicated by Christianity, by chivalry, by asceticism, by mysticism, and we ourselves are so mysteriously affected by heredity, that we can hardly tell what strains may not mingle with our love.

Of course there is something painful about all this. We do not like to feel, like the child in *Through the Looking-glass*, that we are only a thing in some one else's dream, and that when the dreamer awakes, we shall go out like a blown candle ; but we can never be all that we are credited with being by one who loves us ; though if our lovers only saw us as we really were, they would wonder what they had so desired and adorned.

But you may believe what you like, if only you will love me ; and as for myself, the testimony of ninety and nine just persons to the effect that you were not what I believed you to be, would weigh as nothing in the scale, compared with the prodigal hope, the infinite belief to which my heart holds fast.

XXIV

Latchetts, August 2, 1905.

OF all the strange volumes to be lurking here I think the *Letters to Imlay* is the strangest. They were written, you know, by Mary Wollstonecraft (how *does* one *spell* it?) to her lover. That was before she married Godwin, and before *Political Justice* and the *Rights of Woman* between them produced Mrs. Shelley.

It is a dreadful book! I took it up expecting to find something rare, delicate, sensitive. Mary Wollstonecraft had a beautiful, strange, melancholy face! I found a stained and crumpled passion. I felt as I should feel if I opened a cupboard-door in a rich room, and found a blood-spotted cloth in a basin, put away there; what a sordid passion! the love of an

intellectual coarse-minded woman, lavished on an *épicier*! The whole Godwin circle has something ineffably dreary about it. Some academical wit once said that a speech succeeded in being at once wild and dull—two qualities that one would think were mutually exclusive; but these letters are both; and then they are so disagreeable, too; there are some starred omissions; I cannot think what the omitted passages can have been, considering what has been printed. The tone is at once romantic and sordid; the letters are like heavy slices of life, ladlefuls of some thick nauseous soup. I do not say there are not some pretty passages, but they are draggled, like herbs drowned in soup. I read and read in a disgustful curiosity, threw the book down, went out.

Just below the house here is a lane, leading down to a little rustic bridge, with a pleasant wild strip of ground beside it, full of little dense thickets of thorns and hazels, with ash-trees rising above the brake—such an English scene! The sun shone out

suddenly, and there came along a boy leading a big plodding white horse, drawing a cart of hurdles. The materials of the vignette common-place enough, all depending on a trick of grouping, an effect of light and shade. It was just like a Constable sketch, the sunburnt boy, the jolly horse, the rustic furniture of the cart, with its bright colours, its big muddy wheels, the blue-green foliage of the ash defining itself against the climbing copse behind.

That is art ! The materials of the scene as simple as possible, but eternally beautiful. While poor Mary's letters are just a piece of life, and a very mouldered worm-eaten piece too ; plenty of intellect and sophistry, and even humanity, about them ; but these dreary cries of a sensuous, wilful, overstrained mind, which, defying respectability, has dipped deliberately into the stream of sin, have nothing to attract, sustain, or uplift.

And so I say again that the artist must not wade into the stream, however cool

THE WEARINESS OF THE WAY 93

and pleasant it may seem ; he must sit,
toilworn and with aching eyes, on the bank ;
he may never linger ; for he has far to
go, before the night falls cold among the
woodlands.

XXV

Latchetts, *August 6, 1905.*

HERE is an odd little adventure. I was strolling yesterday along a little path through some woods, a long way from here, when I met a good-natured man, rather florid in style—too much hair, rather too curly, too much hat, too much knickerbocker, too much eye—altogether redundant. He nodded pleasantly to me, and made some remark about the weather. I asked him if the path led out on the high road. "Yes," he said; "but it depends where you want to get to." I told him. He said, "Well, that is a long way round. You had better come through my place here; it will save you a mile." He turned round, and I apologized for taking him out of his way. "Oh no, I was just strolling," he said with a smile. He led the way to

a little gate, and we went up a steep path among rhododendrons, and presently emerged upon such a scene! An old manor-house quite hidden in the wood, in a luxuriant old garden, with a simply divine view, over the tree-tops, of plain and down. It was almost too good to be true. We had fallen to talking about the country-side, about books. He said suddenly, "I think we must be of the same trade; you are a writer?" "A journalist," I said. Was it fancy, I wonder, or did he become more civil? He certainly seemed to warm to me. "Ah," he said, "you are the sort of man before whom I cower—I am"—and he mentioned a name which I will keep back for the present (Don't look at the end of my letter to see what it was!). As we were passing the lawn, a footman and a butler were bringing out tea in state. "Stop and have a cup of tea!" he said, and then, when I hesitated, "I am alone to-day," he added; "my wife has gone out, and taken our guests—poor creatures—to a garden-party. Now, of all the abominations

I think garden-parties the worst." He had struck me, I confess, as exactly the sort of healthy, rather pretentious man who would have liked a garden-party. He read me like a book. "I see," he said; "you would have thought that a sociable sort of easy-going man like me would have enjoyed it—but one has to play a part, you know, and that is a bore." Well, we had tea, and he told me an amazing lot about himself. Could he have thought I should use it? I fear he did think so, because he said once, with a quick glance, "Mind, this is not an interview!" He was rather an engaging fellow, frankly pleased with himself and his nice house, his wealth and prosperity. "Half the fun of it all, I confess," he said to me, with transparent frankness, "is to make it all by writing. I haven't a penny but what I make—but then I have a vogue; and whatever rot I wrote—and probably you think a good deal of it *is* rot, there are a certain number of people who would think it the right thing to have read it." We were interrupted by a sudden incursion of people;

an extraordinarily pretty, sociable, kindly young wife, as proud of her husband as she could be, and some well-dressed, well-brushed automatons of persons, pleasant in that finished indifferent way in which well-bred people are pleasant. "I am entertaining an angel unawares," my host said, with a genial smile. I murmured my name, and he presented me as if he had known me all his life. I found myself at home, too, more's the wonder; and I spent a pleasant hour there, my host walking down the drive with me to the road, and pressing me to come again.

Now I will tell you his name, It was Carew, the great novelist. Of course I think his novels very poor stuff, but there is a vitality about them, and he sells a book by thousands. He is certainly a thoroughly and completely happy man, and I do not grudge him a particle of his good fortune. The happiest trait of all is that he is evidently a completely dramatic person, like a man in a book. He is the centre to himself of a drama, and he is aware how picturesque he is. His talk was witty, ready, and even

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Anyhow, the little fillip has done me good, and, what is more, it has made me content to be what I am.

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subtle; he was aware that he had an audience. If one could only feel that, how exciting, how sustaining life would be! The whole setting, the pretty adoring wife, the admiring guests, the easy wealth of the whole *mise-en-scène*, all comfortably earned by two or three hours' work a day! I believe he dictates to a shorthand writer, and I am told he never gives his book another thought all day. The pleasure of the scene—and it gave me honestly a great deal of pleasure—was Carew's own frank and grateful delight in it all. He is quite a self-made man, a poor journalist to begin with. The only trace of that is a slight sense of stage-effect about him. But the whole sight did me good, because it is pleasant to see any one find the world so entirely satisfactory a place. If I were successful, I should not live like that. I should have fewer servants and fewer visitors; but the place and the house are perfect. I have no wish to belittle his work. I could not write the books he writes, and I do not honestly think I would if I could. I do not know! It would mean a very pleasant

degree of liberty. Yet I do not think he looks upon himself as a creative artist at all, but rather as a tradesman who can supply a demand. My impression is that he is much more proud of gauging the folly of the public so successfully, than of the beauty of his work. I may be wrong about that, but I do not think I am.

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XXVI

Latchetts, *August 8, 1905.*

TO-DAY I determined that I would do no work, but that I would surrender myself wholly to indolence, which means that I have thought of you all day continuously.

It was fiercely hot; and I have walked all day, by forest roads, among woods and copses, in beautiful inconsequent lanes, high-banked, full of flowers and twisted tree-roots and sandy caves. I came out at length, in the heart of the wood, upon a long wild open heathery valley; there was a far-off view of distant downs, all drowned in haze. I found a great beech-tree, with a mossy seat at its foot, looking down a hot slope of heather, in crimson bloom, all musical with bees. Down below, among the birches and pines, I could see the sparkle of a clear pool of water. I sate here for an

hour in deep calm—then my heart sent you message after message—I wonder if you felt them, if you perceived that I was near? Yes, I was happy thus, even though we were far apart. I forgot myself, and lived only in the thought of you. And yet, dear, I felt that you could not give me all I want; only God can do that; and perhaps the reason why He has made me so conscious of my dryness, my emptiness, is that some day, when the time is at last come, if I have been a little faithful, He will fill me with the water of life, of which, if a man once drink, he shall never thirst again. I thirst, I thirst! None but He knows how deeply—and for what? That I cannot tell.

I went onward in the hot silent afternoon. Then, in a forest clearing, I found a little old church, so patient, so weary-looking, amid its graves and yews. It was open, and I sate long in the delicious coolness. I do not think that God is closer to me in these shrines, than on the honied hill-side. But one draws nearer to the sweetest and purest human emotions. A church is a place where

people have prayed their best and tenderest—where they have had to come face to face with loss and broken love ; where they have buried their dearest memories, where they have hidden heart and treasure alike. The one thought that comes home to me in such a place, is that whatever the strange secret of life and death is, it is all in His hand—that He sends us life and death, strength and weakness ; that we can do so little of ourselves, and even less than we know. That He gives us the hope and the despair alike ; that we *must* trust Him, whether we will or no. There in that hour I prayed to Him, and sent Him many a message from my poor unquiet heart, just as I had done to you an hour before. I think His heart is kind ; He knows us, whether He loves us or no.

I have returned in a sweeter, simpler, calmer mood, because I have lived less in myself, and more in God and in you.

But even so my art begins to close in upon me again ; to peep and beckon to me : to chide me for my indolence. What is it

that pursues me? I do not hope to win your love by it—it is rather the other way. I do not hope to recommend myself to God by practising my art. Yet to draw nearer to Him and to you are the things I most desire ; but even as I write the words, the strange inexplicable thrill comes over me to express, to create, to render into the soft colours of words and phrases the thoughts that haunt me. I cannot be untrue to that desire, however weary and loveless a path I may have to tread. It may be a passion, an appetite which keeps me away from Him, and separates me from you. It may be evil utterly—a phantom of my miserable mind. But if it is so, I must even abide in the prison that I have made, even though the key be lying in my bosom, as it lay in Christian's, within reach of my careless hand, which should deliver me and set me in a place of liberty.

XXVII

Latchetts, *August 9, 1905.*

WHAT I should like best, if it were possible, would be for us to float together into a quiet haven of friendship—to come to a complete and perfect understanding, so that we should be able to say to each other exactly what we thought, and as we thought it, feeling quite sure that we loved each other, and trusted each other for ourselves, for what we really are ; so secure in affection, that we should not only not dread any self-revelation, but simply feel that we were drawing nearer and nearer to the bare and naked reality. I suppose that every one has that feeling about himself or herself ; one knows oneself through and through, one's faults, one's weaknesses, one's meanesses. Sometimes one makes excuses for oneself. Sometimes one makes none, but

sees the shallows of one's own character as clearly as the depths. And yet the problem of one's self is the one problem of paramount importance ; one may have a scorn and contempt for certain qualities of one's own ; one may wish, nay, one does wish, to be different ; but only by a strained, morbid, and hysterical process, can one really utterly despise and hate one's self ; in fact, one cannot help admiring and loving, I suppose, the part of one that hates, and scorns, and passes judgment on the outlying qualities. However much we err, however indolent and wayward we are, yet there is an inmost stronghold of the spirit, where one is generous and pure and noble ; one may know that, if ever one ventures out of the inmost cell, one is conquered, over-ridden, tumbled in the dust by one's baser qualities. Yet very few of us could say sincerely, as the Master of Ballantrae said insincerely, "You see I am a pretty bad fellow at bottom." If one really felt that, nothing would be possible but self-destruction. Neither is one ever really appalled at any

revelation of meanness or baseness in one's self; one has always suspected the possibility of it; one has only been thankful, in a vague way, that circumstances have been kind, and that one has seldom had the opportunity of showing how feeble one can be.

The sort of relation that I should desire would be that we should each feel the other to be the one important and inscrutable fact: we might know that we were bound to try and help each other to do better, but we should no more think of repining because of each other's faults, than we should repine because we were not so handsome or so tall as we should wish. In such a partnership we should improve—at least I should; for I do not forget for a moment how far ahead upon the road you are. You have all or most of the virtues which I lack. You are strong, serene, unselfish, kind. There is very little that I could give you—and yet the blessed fact that you can love me shows me that there is something in me that is worthy to be loved—and that is the most encouraging thing in the world.

Yet nothing is so mistaken as the belief that we love people for their qualities. We condone every error in those whom we love ; we pass over fine qualities, and call them mere instincts, in the case of those we do not love ; what we love is a person, and what we love them for is their lovability for us. Some of the purest love that I have ever seen manifested is such love as the love of a mother for a worthless child—the most pathetic thing in the world, when a noble and generous heart tries to interpret to others a base and mean temperament, tries to assure others that the poor thing is lovable *au fond*. But if two people could be utterly frank and open with each other, hide nothing, beautify nothing, what a strength would be there ! Perhaps one can only dare to do that to God ; yet the best gifts I have ever received from the hand of God, have been the strength and courage I have received from Him, times without number, when I have put myself utterly in His hands in all my weakness, “Just as I am, without one plea.”

Is such a relation possible between a woman and a man? I am not sure. It would be possible, I think, between two men, or between two women; I do not understand women. It is often a bewildering surprise to me to see how your mind works; I have often wondered at your insight and judgment. But I have wondered still more deeply at the fact that you have often seemed to me to come to the right conclusions for reasons which seem to me to point to exactly the opposite conclusion. A woman, I think, has often not enough logic, just as a man has often too much. But I think—I do not know if I am right—that you could not part with a certain mystery and reserve about yourself, which I have often tried to penetrate in vain. You like, I think, to conceal your motives; perhaps that is because you trust to intuition rather than argument. I, on the other hand, long to make my motives plain, because I trust to reasoning too much.

But if you could promise me the relation which I crave for, so that there would no

longer be any reserve between us, or the least possibility of misunderstanding, I should fly to you. But I do not think you could ; and you will at least see how utterly I trust you, when I put myself so wholly in your hands.

XXVIII

Latchetts, *August 12, 1905.*

I AM sure that the one thing that most of us desire is to be loved—at least before the crust hardens, before one grows to despise emotion, before one comes to think that a good position and a comfortable income are the important things.

And yet how strangely we go about it ! Our idea of gaining love is to try to show off our brilliance, our accomplishments, our cleverness. We love to play games gracefully, to talk impressively. We put the finishing touches to our toilette, we look approvingly in the glass, and we go down to collect admiration.

Now, I have an old nurse still living, who is simply the most lovable person in the world. I cannot describe to you the sort of love I have for her ; it is quite different

from the love I have for you, but it is in one sense both purer, stronger, and deeper.

She is very old now ; but from morning to night, all day long, and all through the past years, she never has had a thought of herself at all. Her one idea has been to do her work, her one joy to do any little service she can for any one whom she has loved. She is perfectly simple, kindly, sweet-tempered ; not without shrewdness, and with a serene dignity of her own. She is always exactly the same. She welcomes me, when I go to see her, with tears, she says good-bye to me with tears ; she thinks of me, I do not doubt, day after day—she has no idea what I am thinking of, she would not understand a word of it if I were to tell her. She does not think of any of my qualities, or gifts, or unhappinesses, or disappointments ; she simply thinks of myself.

She has no principles, I think, no particular religion ; she could hardly say why she was a Christian ; she could hardly repeat the Apostles' Creed ; and if she could, she

would not be able to explain it. Yet it is the most perfect Christian life I have ever seen. When she is ill, she lies there grateful for anything that is done for her, just thinking quietly of the old days, and of her nurslings who are all gone out into the world. She never wished to appear beautiful or clever or attractive! She has the beauty of happy age, and of a face from which self has not been cast out, for it was never there; but where self has graved no single line or wrinkle.

That is the sort of character that evokes devoted love and affection in every single human being that draws near to it. That is the sort of love, that suffers long and is kind, which evokes love, though we are too blind to see it. That is the kind of love that I think sometimes waits for us behind the veil of life and death.

XXIX

Latchetts, *August 15, 1905.*

I HAVE been re-reading your letters, and they have given me great joy. The curious thing about them is that, though your letters are far more, according to our compact, about yourself than mine are about myself, yet they are not so egotistical as mine, because they are written for me, and not for your own satisfaction. An egotist's letters are written for his own pleasure.

But one thing you must not accuse me of, of yielding to self-pity. That is not true, dear! I am in many ways very unhappy, but it is not a self-pitying unhappiness. I do not think of my unhappiness as my own fault exactly, because it comes from causes which lie far beyond my own control; but I do not, on the other

hand, think of myself as a pathetic or touching figure; the disappointments and sorrows of other people seem to me far more pathetic than my own. I do not want any pity but yours and God's; indeed I rather resent being pitied. I do not understand my own unhappiness, but I am never in any doubt that it comes to me from some deliberate purpose, and is meant to lead me somewhere. And then, too, I am much more interested in other people, and in ideas, than I am in myself. I am very diffident of my own powers of interesting, pleasing, or charming any one. My habitual feeling is of being unequal to my company, less ready, less agreeable, less attractive than the people I am with. It seems to me, for instance, inconceivable that I am discussed and talked over by my acquaintances. I suppose I am discussed, because every one else is, but it is difficult for me to imagine what there is to say about me. Perhaps it is that I have been anxious to conceal nothing from you; and therefore you think that I have tried to win your pity by descanting

on my inefficiency; and you go on to think that I must be a subject of pathetic contemplation to myself; but it is not so. I have very little vanity or self-satisfaction, and the habitual stuff of my thoughts is an intense preoccupation with what I call my work. I have never been able to reveal that preoccupation to you, because the interest is so technical. If you knew how haunted I am by cadences, phrases, words, the colour of language, methods of expression, you would think I had no time for anything else. The best comparison I can make, is to remind you of your love of your garden, your flowers. I have been with you as you moved hither and thither, I have watched you go to and fro, looking, gazing, wondering. Well, the pleasure of words is to me something like that; they have beautiful identities, colours, shapes; they win a value from their surroundings. I know how you detest what you call a gardener's garden; formal lines and dots of colour; what you love is great masses of flowers, grouped tints, the art which conceals itself. It is

the same with me in the case of words. I love the beautiful naturalness and simplicity which is the result of the highest and most instinctive art.

This preoccupation gives me little time for thoughts about myself, and it is true—and you must believe it—that the moments in which I write to you are often the only egotistical moments of my day.

You say you are not a good letter-writer. It is true in the sense that a stranger reading your letter could form no idea of the charm that surrounds you; but your letters have for me an extraordinary beauty; I can interpret, I can add gesture and glance, and your very reticence has for me a constraining and delicious power.

XXX

Latchetta, *August 19, 1905.*

I SAW a friend to-day, a young man. I have not seen him for some time. When I knew him formerly he was an intensely religious creature, fond of liturgical ceremonies, mystical, prayerful. It was all very irrational, no doubt, but it was beautiful too. His intention was to go into the Church, perhaps enter a contemplative Order. He had his faults; he was indolent, capricious, timid, sentimental: he mooned about, and never seemed to have a firm hold of things.

Now it has all altered; he is a *mondain*; he has had a touch of social success, he has written an interesting book. The religion has all gone by the board; he told me in so many words that he had found that Christianity was all a beautiful dream; he

believes in natural law, he does not believe in the continuance of identity, he does not pray ; but he is, so far as I can see, exactly the same person, except that he is much more amusing and interesting. He has the same faults ; he said frankly that his religion had never affected his character in the smallest degree ; that it was all an artistic emotion. He is not at all a common-place person ; he has originality, enthusiasm, intellect ; he is full of ideas—but I do not think he is different in fundamental ways ; I think he does very much what he did before, and acts on precisely the same motives.

He has made me feel that people are never guided by principles but always by instincts ; if their instincts are of a self-reforming type, they label them principles, and are content. He would have said in old days that his morality was based upon his faith ; but his morality is exactly what it was, and it is not now based on anything at all.

I expect that this is the same with all of

us ; and the religious or philosophical titles which we give to our modes and methods of thought, are retained as a rule for the sake of the associations. How then, one asks one's self, does the world improve ? I suppose that it is a spirit working in us ; but the laws by which individuals or nations progress or decay are hidden from us.

Love seems a regenerating power ; one grows a little nobler, because one tries to make one's self a little worthier of love ; but love must come of itself. We cannot say to ourselves : " I should like to be nobler and worthier, and therefore I will find something to love, that love may improve me." One cannot drink love like a drug, and hope thus to be cured.

XXXI

Latchetts, *August 22, 1905.*

THE nearest that I ever came to my heart's desire was that day when we walked together—I won't vex you by saying, "Do you remember?"—at Berristead, that day of spring. I can see, as clearly as I saw it then, the steely gleam of hyacinths, with their sleek green leaves, through the bare branches of the copse, the anemones down in the dingle, the uncrumpling bracken; the little stream that soaked out of the rushes and babbled to itself, hidden in water-plants, with a sound like the comfortable laughter of an elf, who knows a secret that pleases him, and which he does not wish to repeat. Why do I dwell on these things, when they were not what I went out to see? We talked so freely and easily that day—no effort, no wish to make the most of ourselves! It was a delight to see you, to hear you beside me, but I will not describe you

to yourself, though I remember trying to say things that would provoke you to look at me and smile. I thought that day that I had found what I wanted, and that you had given me just that room in your heart that I desired to occupy.

But the dream fell from me, for when we came in, I could not bear to leave you, desiring I knew not what—it was that haunted, far-off desire, that baffles us at our sweetest moments, when the sharpest bliss seems only to remind us of some other more remote happiness that we have lost, or that we may somewhere attain ; yet I did leave you, because I would not weary you ; and then I went through in my mind all we had said and thought together, and how you had looked from moment to moment, and counted the minutes till I should see you again. It was then, I think, in a dark hour, that I knew where I was drifting ; and that this too, like many another hope and wish, must be put aside. It is torture, sweet torture, to-day to think of all that ; but I must not shrink or falter.

XXXII

Latchetts, *August* 25, 1905.

WHAT *are* the motives which make us act ? Can one ever disentangle them ? Such little, mean, trifling things weigh so much in a decision. One always does what one likes, I believe. But sometimes, surely, one puts aside the petty selfish desire for the larger greater hope ? Yes, but only because one knows that the petty desire, gratified, will bring us nothing that we want, whereas the larger hope gives us the deeper pleasure.

I had a long talk the other day to a stupid, self-righteous priest, who was talking about the necessity of moral effort, and hurling scorn upon this theory of mine ; I said to him at last ;—

“ Well, then, in cases where you have triumphed from a sense of duty over some temptation, do I understand that you take

credit to yourself for having chosen what you thought was right ? ”

“ No, indeed,” he said indignantly.

“ Then,” I said, “ how do you explain it ? ”

“ Oh,” he said, “ speaking humbly and frankly, in language that you will not, perhaps, understand, it was the love of God constraining me, the guidance of His Spirit.”

“ Then where does the effort come in ? ” I said. “ If a man, by an effort of his will, chooses what is hard and good, instead of what is easy and evil, he has a right to take the credit. But if it is all the guidance of the Spirit, it means that God has given to you what he has not given to one who makes the wrong choice.”

“ No ! ” he said. “ One puts one’s will in the Hands of God, and He makes it effectual.”

“ But,” I said, “ I always desire to do the will of God, if I could find out what it is. And if I take what I think is the baser course, who made me what I am ? Who gave me those lower impulses, those passionate

desires ? Does God indeed fight on both sides in the battle ? ”

He said scornfully that this was mere Determinism. But of course that was no answer ; for what one desires, and what one does, alike depend upon remote causes that lie far back beyond our own lives. I feel free to choose ; yet I am conscious that I am hampered sorely in my choice ; how am I to draw the line ? How am I to tell where the hampering ends and the freedom begins ? How much simpler, and more rational, and hopeful, to leave it all to God, and to know that one has done in the past, and will do in the future, just what He would have us to do. If He has dipped me into sin, it is that I may be clean again, and rejoice in my cleanness : for of this I am certain, that He leads us all to hope and joy ; and that the greatest moments of our lives are when we realize, in moments of dreariness and failure, that we are led thither by His Hand. Then indeed we can use the wilderness as a well of healing and refreshment.

You will say that this is all very elementary; it is; but it is what underlies all religion and all life—and all art too. I often think that we hope to be like the people in the fairy tale, who dug wells, and found honey in one, and milk in another, and wine in another. In our experiments in philosophy and religion, we expect to find different liquids; but in this world it will always be water—or something worse! and therefore, as it is the ultimate mystery, I do not forbear to write about it, when it presses heavily on my mind, as it does to-day.

XXXIII

Latchetts, *August 27, 1905.*

I HAVE been reading a dreary book about socialism ; the longer I live, the more I realize that we are not saved by organization or legislation. The only use of legislation is to secure the rights of the weak against the tyranny of the selfish. But that is not how the world advances ; what we advance by is personality. One is brought into contact with a generous and noble character, one who is brave in suffering, tender, loving, gracious ; one sees how beautiful it is, and one goes away determining to make one's own life like that. The effect lasts for a little. One may be weary and ill, disgusted with the dreary world, but one tries to think and speak and smile as if one was well-content. One may have fallen into a mood of indolent, self-satisfied reverie ; and one thrusts it

aside to write a troublesome letter, to try and help a friend in sorrow. Little by little the glow dies out, but we have tried, we have loved goodness a little better, we are a little higher than we were. If the same thing could go on all over the world, the whole moral temperature of humanity would rise, and we should do by instinct what we now do clumsily and reluctantly by legislation. Legislation lags behind morality—it is only the belated ripple of some central enthusiasm. Law is, after all, only a method of frightening evil-minded people into doing what they will not do for a better motive. But the people who really uplift the world, are not the people who make speeches, and sit on committees, and issue reports, and attend League meetings, but the simple, quiet, loving people, who shame those around them into gentleness, and kindle them into love. The kindly good-natured father, the tender careful mother, the sister who cannot bear the atmosphere of strife, the wise physician, the patient schoolmaster, the loving priest—

these are the salt of the world. It matters little how wealthy, how respectable, how robust people are, if they have this inner sweetness, this smiling patience, this eager love. The world is made pure by such as Mary, not by such as Martha. It is easy to call this a sentimental individualism ; but it was the spirit of Christ, who never said a word about organization, or patriotism, or honour, or self-respect ; and it is the spirit of all who have ever lightened the load of the world.

Does it seem to you very pretentious if I say that this is what I desire to do by my writings ; just as the great painter can thrill busy, anxious, conventional hearts with a sense of largeness and serenity, by a picture of a sunny field, a secluded woodland, a liliated pool in a sunset hour, or by the portrait of a wise and kindly face, or of eyes charged with innocent and pure dreams, even so I too desire to bring the peace of God a little nearer to the unquiet hearts, who all the world over are looking for it and cannot find it. Alas, I have not found it myself ! But

I can point the way thither in a silent hour. Do not lose patience with me, dear ! You think I linger half-heartedly in the shade, trying to lose myself in soft dreams. You do not say it in so many words, but you would have me show myself more robust and manly and brave. But is there anything to be gained by a parade of virtues that one does not possess ? You will say "Yes ;" that one can only gain a virtue by practising it—that strength comes by exercise. I think—you will forgive my speaking plainly—that this is one of the conventional ways in which the strength and sweetness of the world is most wasted. To accept the conventional standards, to try and conform one's self to them ; the end of that is, that one wastes the power that might have effected something, in making one's self into a bad copy of every one else. How many men have I known who might have enriched the blood of the world, who have lost themselves in trying to live in a greater degree of comfort than that in which they were brought up ; have spent solitary

and bitter years, because they could not marry without a carriage; have given themselves to arid business, when they might have consoled and uplifted their fellow-men.

We say that there are no fine books to-day, no resonant voices of poets, no noble pictures, no heart-stirring music. That is the result of our gross materialism, because men are ashamed of not being successful; we care for wealth first, and we cannot afford to care for ideas, till we can imbibe them in an arm-chair in a luxurious library. I am myself the victim of these poisonous thoughts. I long to arm myself against the rough world in the comfortable panoply of respectability and security. I feel—odious thought, vile temptation!—that I cannot convert base natures to a belief in ideas, unless I can show them that the publication of such ideas brings me success and comfort. But I will not praise this gaudy and hypocritical generation. I will not flatter or reassure it. I will not say that John Bull may be bluff and greedy, but that he has a large and generous heart. He will give a

shilling to a beggar, but that is only because the sight of rags makes him uncomfortable. He has no tenderness for weakness and sorrow, unless it lies behind a pretty face. He despises with all his heart fanciful and sentimental people; his idea of love is a healthy, good-humoured, and complaisant wife; his idea of hospitality is to call his wealthy neighbours together. He is a pompous prosy old fellow at best; and at worst he is insupportable.

What is the use of these revilings? None but to make one miserable and ineffective.

XXXIV

Latchetts, *September 2, 1905.*

DID you ever happen to see a picture by Ralph Heathcote? One or two are generally to be seen at the Academy, stuck away in a corner. They are landscapes; there were two there last year, one of a great cold lake, in November, I suppose, lying steely-grey and sharply ruffled by a strong icy wind. The sedge rose stiffly from the chilly water, bent all one way by the breeze. The whole picture full of wind, a bitter, nipping wind. How he contrived to make the low, wild, comfortless clouds appear to rack so steadily, I do not know, but the picture was all in motion; one shivered, and drew one's coat closer round one. The other was a heath, with a great vague vista of billowy moorlands behind; huge clouds coming solemnly up from the

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horizon. Both pictures to me perfectly beautiful, not only for their utter truthfulness, but because something seemed to lean and beckon out of them, something remote and high and large.

Heathcote is an old friend of mine ; I knew that he lived not far from here ; yesterday, when I was feeling, for a wonder, almost sociable, I walked over to Isham where he lives. I found that he was established in a little old house by the village green. I went boldly in, and he was at home. Such a charming little house, with tiny panelled rooms, furnished with old furniture ! He has built out a big studio at the back. He is a tall, quiet, good-humoured creature, with the peculiar charm which a combination of great physical strength and natural gentleness always gives. He gave me a simple welcome ; I spent the afternoon with him. He is, I think, one of the happiest people I have ever seen. He has excellent, imperturbable health. He does not mind being alone, he cares for nothing but his art. He showed me

a lot of charming sketches and pictures, and told me frankly that he could not sell them. "But my tastes are very simple, and I can get along." I can't tell you what a refreshment it was to talk to a man who lives so joyfully and serenely in his art. I tried to penetrate his secret, but he did not seem to have any. I have always thought that the landscape-painter is on the whole the man whom I would most envy, even more than the musician. He lives face to face with nature in all its moods. He is much in the open air; his mind is free to meditate. I said to him, when he was describing the sort of life he led, "But what is your aim, your object, in all this?" "I don't know that I ever asked myself the question," he said, with his great quiet smile; "I like the sight of beautiful things; I like trying to render them. I suppose one ought to have a sense of artistic vocation, but I have never had any doubt as to what I wanted to do. I try not to get mannerised; I vary my subjects. I try to see what is there, and to paint it." "But," I said, "there is a great

deal more than that in your pictures ; there is sense of the place, the scene, the hour, the spirit of the thing, selected from a thousand effects, and given permanence ; and then there is the feeling of something great and tender and hopeful behind it all, the secret of the sunset and the wind, the moorland and the lake." He mused a little, and then he said, "Well, if you see that in my pictures—and I am glad you do—it is not because I put it there, but because it is there, and because I have seen it and rendered it ; it is like music to me, the *motif* of the scene, moving through harmonies of colour and line. Of course it is very baffling sometimes, because the sun will come and transpose the key, so to speak, of your picture ; and then one has to wait. But I am no good," he said, "at explaining all this ; it is very vague to me. I seem only content to look and record."

I left him with a sense of singular peace ; the old quiet house, the well-worn furniture, the often-read books pleased me deeply.

Such peace is impossible for the writer ; the painter deals with nature in many moods— but they are not emotional moods, or at all events one cannot get behind the emotion ; but the writer who deals with human emotions, however spectatorially he may try to view them, must experience them too ; he must feel, he must suffer, he must sin, he must grieve ; and then one tries to do all this from the outside, and to stifle one's own life in the contemplation of the lives of others. But one's spirit is strangely worn and dented in the process. I felt, when I was with Heathcote, as though I were immensely old by comparison with him. I felt that the waves and streams of life had gone over me. The painter lives like Ariel ; he is bound to serve, but he swings in the cowslip-bell, he hunts the summer on the bat's back, from lawn to lawn ; but the writer has to battle with a hurrying tide ; his art cannot be pure and soulless and serene. Yet I do not wish to drop the burden, or to curtail the weariness of the way.

Still, when I look out of my window

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here, and see far off over the ridges the top of the high hanging woods over Isham, and think of the quiet and untroubled life that Heathcote is leading there, among his canvases and books, it seems to me like a phantom of unimaginable peace and security. I do not grudge it him; nay, I am glad with all my heart that such a life should be possible, even though it be so unlike my own; and then I reflect that he has not the joy of my anxious and tender care for you; that though he looks with passionless eyes on a beautiful scene, it is not, as it is for me, all tinged with the glowing thought of a heart that feels for me, and to which I would communicate my joy.

No, dear, I would not change if I could; the thought of you fills my heart, as wine fills an empty cup. Be as kind to me as you can. Some day you will be glad that you gave so much joy to a desolate heart, so fenced and guarded in its loneliness, so strangely hedged from life and warmth by its transparent prison-walls.

XXXV

Latchetts, *September 6, 1905.*

WHEN I was hardly more than a boy I read the life of Goethe. I thought it the most splendid and inspiring book in the world; it was that book that made me desire to be an artist. The noble adorable creature, so full of strength and swiftness, walking downwards from the green-lipped caverns of the mountains, among vineyard and olive-close, by field and farm; what would one not have given in exchange for one of his smiles? And he sang too, like a skylark, soaring, pulsating, breasting the sunlit air—I can't tell you what it was to me.

I have read the life again after many years; it seems to me now abominable, licentious, sordid, horrible. He took love and affection and beauty, youth and strength and friendship, but as the fuel to feed his heartless

flame. He was a Moloch, into whose red-hot maw shrieking, struggling, innocent souls were thrust. Those children ! waking early, no doubt, in the dawn, full of excitement at the festivity in which they were to play their part, wondering why the old nurse who arrayed them in white linen and garlands was so tearful and wistful ; why their mother clung to them as they went forth ; and then the procession, and the lewd faces of the brawny priests, and the breath of the fire . . . Goethe was like that. He cared little what his victims suffered, if only they pleased him, if they appealed to his fancy, if they fed his sense of art. He was kind, as the old priest was kind who helped the slender child up the steep steps of the temple.

To use life as the fuel of art. Yes, that is all well, if it is life observed, life perceived, —but not the stuff of life itself ; that is like teaching the dog to love you, that it may lie more quietly to be vivisected, because it cannot believe that you wish it ill. It licks your hand, it wags its tail, it thinks

it is all some new game ; but to enter upon a holy and awestruck experience with the traitorous thought that one will exhaust it, drain its sweetness, throw it aside as one throws the skin and stone of the plum aside, that is to me the vilest wickedness in the world. It is life *or* art. Not one for the other's sake ; or rather it is art for life's sake. For the most I hope to do is to smooth the track of time for those whom unseen I love ; to make life holier, more sweet, more tranquil. To give hope, to brighten the hard edges, as the swimming moon brightens the ragged cloud-rift. To strip off the disguise from evil things, to exalt, uplift, purify. It is because I love so many that I cannot love one. I think of all the tender souls that lean and stand in the porches of life, watching the water, wondering what life may be going to mean. I would persuade them that it means something beautiful, august, noble. I would implore them not to be taken in by the passing dreariness, by the mean house built in the ruined woodland, the naked earth

upturned, the green bank cut harshly through. I would point to the great thrilling, reverberating secret; to the green light of evening behind the black boughs, with the lambent stars quivering beyond the cloud-bank. I would say to others, "Live life to the uttermost; love, taste, drink deep, smile, weep, suffer, fear not!" But the only condition of sincere utterance for me is that I should abjure life, reject it; keeping myself pure and cold.

XXXVI

Latchetts, *September* 10, 1905.

YES, as you say, the whole question of multiplying friendships is a very difficult one. It is easy to say that love is not a substance of which one has a certain amount, but that it is a condition of mind, like a flame, from which innumerable flames can be kindled without wasting the original flame. I have said the same thing myself, probably to you. But the difficulty is that we are finite creatures, and have only a certain amount of nervous force and time at our disposal. A friendship requires time—time to speak, to write, to think. And if one is thinking very much about a particular person, one is not probably thinking very much about other people; then one is accused of a lack of loyalty and fidelity. It is easy to say, "Oh,

I am as loyal and true and faithful as ever, but I have no time to see you, to think of you, to write to you." But that statement is not easily believed. Ought one then, after a certain time of life, to consider that one has enough friends, and to make no new ones? Ought one to feel like a patron with a certain number of livings in his gift, which can only be filled up when they are vacant? Ought one to feel that, if a friend dies, that gives one another vacancy which may be filled? The thing only requires to be stated in that matter-of-fact and brutal way to show how ridiculous it is. Yet I have suffered a good deal by being accused of a lack of loyalty. You see, I find it easy to make friends; if I am brought into contact with a human being, I find it very hard not to give and invite confidences: and then one becomes aware that one has incurred another obligation. I have sometimes taken an oath that I will not make another friend. I have invariably broken it. My own theory is a very different one; I have never in my life reproached any one,

or blamed any one in my heart, for dropping me. I have always known that a suspension of intercourse was the result of changed conditions, and that my own feelings did not alter. I have sometimes indeed fancied that, when one is set free by death from material conditions, one may be able to be in relations with many people at once. Probably you will think that my temperament is a cold one, and that a certain amount of jealousy is inseparable from vital affection ; but my own belief is that jealousy is a very elementary instinct, almost physical in origin, and that we ought to have got beyond it now. My own impulse is, if I meet a congenial person, to hurry through the initial stages of a friendship, the curious excitement, the desire to conquer and annex and explore, and to reach the happy table-land of frankness and mutual understanding. It seems to me that we are all on pilgrimage, and that our way lies sometimes in the company of one pilgrim, sometimes in the company of another. I like to enter Mr. Interpreter's house, and to make friends

RELATIONSHIPS

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with the ~~extra~~ ~~part~~ ~~of~~ ~~my~~ ~~mind~~ . and
then to go on my way smiling . for the
fact that I have made friends with them
does not keep me from entering the home
of Mr. Gains when the time comes and
sitting up all night watching him and
answering riddles of a metaphysical character
and when I go home I find it as the
particular ~~thing~~ in Mr. Gains's grave eye
that tells me I have made another friend.

Let me quote you a sonnet that I came
upon the other day, in a little book of verse
by one Elizabeth Fox Howard . It is called
To a distant friend, and a true friend—

"We do not wait for friendships . you are I
And through the accidents of time and place
It seldom happens we are lost to each
As the strong tide of busy life rolls by
But though we are full many a season long
Though others live with ours more closely than
Than ever mine with yours or yours with mine
Yet never doubt, nor at the worst deny
That there is something where our paths have crossed
Which cannot be confused with night and day
Distinct and fragrant, permanent and true
What we have gained and given is not lost
Nothing can spoil or change what is well
Just what you are to me and I to you"

That is very ~~delicious~~ ~~pleasant~~ and

h

or blamed any one in my heart, for dropping me. I have always known that a suspension of intercourse was the result of changed conditions, and that my own feelings did not alter. I have sometimes indeed fancied that, when one is set free by death from material conditions, one may be able to be in relations with many people at once. Probably you will think that my temperament is a cold one, and that a certain amount of jealousy is inseparable from vital affection ; but my own belief is that jealousy is a very elementary instinct, almost physical in origin, and that we ought to have got beyond it now. My own impulse is, if I meet a congenial person, to hurry through the initial stages of a friendship, the curious excitement, the desire to conquer and annex and explore, and to reach the happy table-land of frankness and mutual understanding. It seems to me that we are all on pilgrimage, and that our way lies sometimes in the company of one pilgrim, sometimes in the company of another. I like to enter Mr. Interpreter's house, and to make friends

with the candid, pure-eyed maidens ; and then to go on my way smiling ; but the fact that I have made friends with them, does not keep me from entering the house of Mr. Gaius, when the time comes, and sitting up all night, cracking nuts and answering riddles of a theological character ; and when I go thence, I like to see that particular flutter in Mr. Gaius's grave eyes, that tells me I have made another friend.

Let me quote you a sonnet that I came upon the other day, in a little sheaf of verse by one Elizabeth Fox Howard. It is called, *To a distant friend*, and it runs thus—

“ We do not want for friendships, you and I,
And through the accidents of time and place
It seldom chances we are face to face
As the strong tide of busy life rolls by.
But though we own full many a nearer tie,
Though other lives with ours more closely twine,
Than ever mine with yours, or yours with mine,
Yet never doubt, nor let the world deny,
That there is something where our paths have crossed
Which cannot be confused with aught beside,
Distinct and fragrant, permanent and true ;
What we have gained and given is not lost.
Nothing can spoil or change, whate'er betide,
Just what you are to me, and I to you.”

That is very delicately perceived and

said; I don't think I have ever seen it precisely said before, but it is *exactly* what I think. The tint of one's spirit, blended with the tint of another, the result is not precisely the same as any other combination in the world; and my relation to my various friends is just that.

Of course there are things which do break friendships; misunderstandings, harsh judgments, unkindnesses, bitternesses; but I can say honestly that I have never had a case in my own life in which, if I had once reached a certain point in a friendship, the relation has ever been really broken, though it has been suspended. Once or twice I have been utterly mistaken in a friend. I have discovered, at a certain point, a real and vital incompatibility; once or twice a friend, whom I had thought secure, has broken off relations with me; and I have supposed that he or she has discovered some such radical incompatibility; but I have never felt a touch of resentment or vexation, though I have been sorry; no explanations are the slightest use; one

cannot make or keep a friend by just arguments.

Of course there are people to whom the whole of this letter would seem transcendental, sentimental, emotional, stuffy ; who do not want relations of the kind at all. One can't help that. There are people who are colour-blind, and who have no ear for music, but their experience does not prove that colour and melody have no existence. The victory is always with those who feel.

Is it not possible that you and I can be even thus ?

XXXVII

Latchetts, *September 14, 1905.*

IT shows how unreasonable one is, and how one's philosophy breaks down when it is put to the test. I am quite unduly disturbed that you have told Miss Palliser that we are in close correspondence. It is not worth while being misunderstood by conventional people. They grin like a dog and run about the city; and then the other dogs begin to grin too. Sentiment, it seems to me, is a thing for private consumption. It is all part of the same thing, no doubt; I am undemonstrative, and demonstrativeness makes me uncomfortable. It is really that I have not got the dramatic faculty, which brings some people so much happiness; when I read a book, I don't want to be like the portrait of a gentleman reading. I want to sit and watch life, like a cat watching

a bowl of gold-fish, and every now and then to reach one out with a delicate paw. But I suppose that one can't expect to get happiness out of life without playing a part in it. It is like the recreant priests in the Old Testament who struck their hook into the cauldron, and took out the sacrificial meat; they did not like it boiled, you remember, but demanded it raw, for their own roasting. There lay their sin—they ought to have been content to take it as it came.

I want to keep our friendship to ourselves; I don't want other people peering through the glass and breathing upon it. Do you remember the delicate-minded lady traveller in Japan, who retired to bed surrounded by paper screens? When she woke in the morning, she saw an odd sort of pattern on the paper; and presently became aware, from the soft movements outside the screens, that the pattern was nothing else than holes pricked by curious natives in the screen; and that every hole had its eye. The room was full of eyes

within. The idea that Miss Palliser knows about our correspondence, and that she will amuse her friends by telling them, (I dare say she will not, but they will find out), makes me feel as if the screens were full of eyes. "What does it matter?" you will say. "It will not affect us." No, it will not affect our incomes, or our comforts, or our liberty, or our thoughts. But I shall feel like the man in one of Henry James's books, who said that the thought that he was being discussed by his wife and her cousin was just as if he knew that the footman was wearing his hat. The human race is divided into the people who like to know what is said of them by others, and the people who do not wish to know. Now, I should not care how much I was discussed, if I never knew I was being discussed. I have not the slightest curiosity as to what other people think of me.

So, if you can, dear, bind Miss Palliser over to keep the peace; and do not tell people that we correspond. You will say, and feel, that you do not want to have any

secrecy about it, and that anything clandestine makes you uncomfortable. If other people were not stupid and so uncharitable, I should feel the same; and yet the odd thing is that I think I trust people more than you do, and find it easier to be intimate and confidential.

XXXVIII

Latchetts, *September 18, 1905.*

YOU say that I am too intellectual, too subtle for you ; that you are neither subtle nor intellectual yourself. And that is true. You could not otherwise be so calm and wise and patient as you are. I do not love you for your likeness to myself, but for your unlikeness. If you were sensitive, acute, discriminating, fitful, you could not have been to me what you are. But I have walked in every maze of mental intricacy and psychological complexity, and I know the bitterness and futility of those dark groves ; the paths that lead to nothing, the labyrinths that return upon themselves. God knows I would not have you walk there ; it is enough that my temperament leads me into that shadowy region, and that I can return, like the home-coming bird, to

make my roost among the quiet branches of the steadfast tree. Yet you understand, you sympathize. I have sometimes wondered, when spinning these fevered textures of words, whether you would discern the pattern beneath the ornament. You have always discerned it; you have cast the ornament aside. Believe me when I tell you that I have even spun my finest webs, to see if your heart could find the simple way through them. You have never failed to find it. I cannot tell you how your simple, direct, quiet letters have made me feel your genius. You have always laid your finger with perfect and serene certainty upon the point, upon the issue, though tangled with argument and illustration. I have laughed aloud to see how the sophistries, which would have bewildered my most ingenious friends, have yielded their secret to you. No, you are not clever; how often have I thanked God for that. A clever woman would have caught up a phrase, refined upon it, fanned herself with it, tossed and tortured it; and I should have

seen the self-conscious glance, hankering for admiration, claiming praise for its dexterity. It is your perfect simplicity, your largeness of view, that have brought me again and again to your feet. Of course you do not know this; how should you? But when you say that you are not clever enough to answer my arguments, you have only sifted my arguments like corn. The grain has fallen through; the chaff is blown away upon the dancing air. How I have envied your calm and discreet wisdom, your unerring sagacity! You have never been misled by rhetoric, you have never failed to discern feeling. You have been as a God, knowing good and evil. You will not even think, as many a woman would think, that I am paying you extravagant compliments, in order that I may try to persuade myself that I believe what I say. You will just know that you are what I want and need; my restless heart dips and wavers, as the boat dips upon the sea; that is why I love and trust you so utterly, because I rest upon you. It is a common image on the

lips of poets to speak of two kindred souls as voyaging side by side ; but there is no power in that ; they can but hail each other, make signals, and cut the hissing breaker side by side ; rather, as I gaze from the prow, I see or feel you as the moving flood all about me, meeting the sky from marge to marge ; you are the sea for me, and God the sky.

XXXIX

Latchetts, *September 22, 1905.*

I MUST send you, dear, one little caution ; not to attach too much weight to any particular sentence in my letters, or indeed to any particular letter. Each letter is a mood, and though I do not mean that I ever deliberately say what I do not at the moment believe—and least of all in my letters to you—yet people like myself are somewhat at the mercy of moods—they carry one away, like a strong horse that one can guide a little, but not wholly control ; one does not consciously yield to the mood, but it possesses one ; and by a kind of emotional logic, a sort of surprised sympathy, one advances further along the track than one would go if one was tranquil and self-possessed. I do not suppose that you sympathize with that ; you are equable,

calm, controlled ; your principles and your instincts, even your emotions, are always, so to speak, inside yourself ; that is what makes you so secure a refuge for one who, like myself, is tossed upon the waves of feeling and thought ; it is your calm and wise judgment, full of tenderness and sweetness, that sustains me ; it quiets me to know that you are in the world, and that however far I wander, I can still turn again home.

But with me it is wholly different ; a mood, a thought pounces on me like a hawk upon a young bird, bears me aloft, tears and devours me. It always vexes me deeply, as with a sense of hopeless misunderstanding, when a critic of my books treats page after page, chapter after chapter, as deliberate conclusions, arrived at by a steady process of argument ; an unimaginative critic thinks that one works out a philosophy by a sort of mathematical calculation, and that when one has made the ground good up to a certain point, one goes a step further ; but the thoughts of a nature swayed by poetical emotion, as mine is, are like the wrack which

the sea casts up ; they were living things once, swimming and floating and crawling in the brine ; but the sea recedes again, and then they are mere blistered and crackling husks, only serving to mark where the tide has once flowed. An old book of one's own is often even more alien to a later mood, than it is to an outside critic of it. I read sometimes a former book of my own, only a year or two old, and say to myself, "Is it possible that I can ever even have supposed myself to think that?" It is not necessarily even a process of growth ; sometimes, indeed, one comes to a conclusion, one has a real and true perception, which becomes a vital fact of one's nature ; but one's statements are often nothing more than experiments, blown bubbles, dream-fancies, which are hollow things, because the very thoughts from which they were deductions were hollow too. One of the best and finest faculties you have is your power of distinguishing the imaginary from the real ; and often, when I delude myself in following a mood, I repose on the thought

that I shall not delude you, but that you will lay your finger on the point at which I have ceased to be myself, and sweep away what is nothing but the scum and froth of the mood.

This is a tangled letter ; but what I want to ask is that you will not allow your own sincerity of nature to read itself into words of mine, which though they are said sincerely enough, are not really my true self. Do you remember the demons in the gospel which cried out from inside a man, and uttered things which he could not of himself have known ? The brain of the demoniac conceived the thought, I suppose, though he did not originate it ; and it was through his lips and tongue that the syllables were framed ; it was his breath that gave them shape. It is so, in a sense, with a poet ; but the thought is master of him, and not he of the thought. It is as when the wind stirs in the strings of a suspended lute, and the echo of the chord thrills faintly on the air ; it is no mortal touch that awakes that delicate harmony, but the mere

concurrence of inanimate influences. Do not hold me to my beliefs ! Do not say, " In such a day you held this or that, and expressed it vehemently, and now you would deny it ! " I neither deny nor affirm ; I but discern and express. The artist in the sunlight speaks as though the air was ever golden ; in the night-time he speaks as though the darkness would brood for ever over the world. I say this, not because you have ever misunderstood me, but in order that you may feel that, if I passionately reject on a certain day a thought that I have no less passionately worshipped in a past hour, it is not that I am insincere on either occasion. The rejected thought may indeed be true ; but the artist is not concerned with absolute truth ; that is for the man of science—with the artist that is true which is perceived, and that is untrue which, though it may have an actual existence, is for the moment veiled in cloud.

XL

Latchetts, *September* 26, 1905.

YOUR letter is a very difficult one to answer; the thing is so delicate that it is almost impossible to put it into words without saying coarse, harsh, wounding things. But I must try, because this is a real crisis, a door past which we must go, if we are to journey further together.

You feel—let me say it as dispassionately as I can—that I am really thinking more of my own happiness than of yours. Forgive me if I say anything that hurts or wounds you—you know I would rather cut off my hand than do that. And believe me too that I am turning out the very inner lining of my heart before your eyes.

I cannot conceive of myself as being essential to any one's happiness. If you knew me as I know myself—and I have

tried to keep nothing back from you—you would see that I go through life as a beggar, depending on the charity of others. I have never dreamed of asking any one to give themselves up to me, to be mine; I have only asked them to spare me all that they can.

I have no power of sustaining or of satisfying any one; I have nothing to give, except affection, admiration, worship. I have no resources, nothing to reward any one with. Of course the other side of that picture is to think of me as a kind of vulture, floating in the desert air until it scents its food, and then gorging itself; or to put it more tenderly, I am like the pigeon of the roof, that comes bowing and cooing to be fed; like the cat, which puts out a soft paw on one's hand, to remind one that it would like milk. I think, alas, that this is true. But what would you have me do? Would you like me to become conscious of the priceless privilege of my conversation and friendship, and royally to reward those whom I favour? You will

think that it shows an ungenerous heart, and that one who is prepared freely to receive should be ready freely to give. What have I to give? Neither gold nor frankincense nor myrrh. I cannot come like the old wandering princes, following the star. All I can do is to gaze with all my eyes, like the ox and the ass by the manger, (a dog, you will think, in that particular place, would be a truer comparison!)—or like the shepherds who saw the angels, and heard with wonder their harmonious cries. But if there is anything in my hand it is yours; my crook and my wallet. I will give you time and work and thought and abundance of worship; but I cannot give you my life, because I should only end by claiming yours. Can you not trust me when I say that, if I joined my life to yours, you would only find that, like Sinbad, you had the old man of the sea upon your shoulders?

Here, apart from you, I can give you my best; and I can bear my own burden. Closer to you, I should give you my worst

as well, and my burden would be yours. Call me the worst name by which you could call me—a transcendent egotist. Do you not know how such natures have the power of sucking, like spiders, all the life out of the flies that they enmesh? I am not noble in any way, but I am at least generous enough not to yield to the temptation. For a temptation it is. The two things that give me strength to resist are, first the determination to spare you pain and disappointment, and next, the belief that I have a work that I can do apart from you, which I cannot do beside you.

I say what I have said before—that if you demand me, I am yours. I find myself, in a luxurious mood, wishing that you would demand it—how much strain and weariness and sorrow and darkness it would save me! But, on the other hand, my inner, purer, higher heart prays with all its might that you will not demand it. Help me, do not tempt me! And of your charity never again believe that I do not consider your happiness; form what ties you will, but do not mate

yourself to one like me. You are too brave, too noble for that. Believe me, that though your friendship is the best and dearest thing I have, I would resign it without a murmur, never hope to see your smile again or hear your voice, if I felt that you were happier so.

XLI

Latchetts, October 1, 1905.

WELL, I will see you, then, since you demand it. If you knew how my pulses leap at the thought, you would not call me cold. But I think you are making a grievous mistake, and I pray that you will not repent it.

My movements are these. I am returning to my work the day after to-morrow, with what repugnance and reluctance I cannot say. But my money is exhausted, and I have not been so successful as I had hoped. My book is not finished, and I can work at nothing else. Of course I will come and stay with you, for as long as you desire. But do not ask me to do that! It would be too much for my fortitude. Think of what it means. The society of yourself, your beautiful house, all the deli-

cate and fragrant atmosphere of home that appeals to me on every side; on the other hand, there are my dingy lodgings waiting for me—the noisy street, the smell of cooking, the bawling voices. The country has spoilt me, and I am capable of falling a victim to the temptations of ordered, easy life. My nerves, grown indolent and tranquil in solitude and green woodlands, prickle and throb at the sense of the ugliness to which I am returning.

Let us meet in London. Mrs. Smyth will lend you her drawing-room for an hour or two—there we shall stand on alien ground.

Do not be vexed if I am dull and sluggish and dry. I have almost lost the use of my tongue. Do not be too kind to me! One would think that this was St. Anthony writing to the fair lady who called one day at his cell, when he was chewing palm-leaves and rolling among thorns! It is horrible to write thus, but I feel myself slipping on the edge of the precipice. Every sense that I have cries out at the

thought of the delight of seeing you ; but I am become like a bottle in the smoke, so brown, so lean, so rustical, that you will be horrified.

Wire to me if you change your mind. But, unless I hear to the contrary, I shall leave this house at ten on Wednesday, and I shall be at Mrs. Smyth's house at two-thirty. My train to the North leaves at seven. We shall have four hours—and think of this ; that in that time we shall say what, if it were written down, would be more than all the letters I have written to you, and all your replies ! But I still hope you will tell me not to call ; though I will confess to you if you did forbid me it would overshadow me for days. God help the creature whom He has made so strangely !

XLII

4, Russell Road, Leeds,
October 4, 1905.

YOU were wonderfully good to me, dear, yesterday. Patient and tender and sweet and true. I might have trusted you ; I will never mistrust you again. You pitied me with all your heart, I could see ; and you left me free to choose. I will write to you again ; all I love best seems slipping from me ; I am not sure of anything, I am like a broken vessel—in the dust of death.

Life here is horrible, inconceivably horrible. My whole nature aches at the dreariness, the loudness, the sickening ugliness of it all. But I won't speak more of that. I will only say that I am deeply and devotedly grateful to you ; that I never realized the depth and beauty and serenity and sweetness of your nature before, though you were only

a little lower than the angels in my thought. Whatever may befall us, there is that between us of which I hardly dare to think—your perfect and wise acquiescence, your determination to let me do what I thought right. “Right”—what a dull and dusty word I once thought it; yet how full of strange complexities and intricacies it is!

But your looks and words will be mine for ever; and in the very swoon and swirl of death I shall see you, I think, as you sate yesterday by the open window, as you turned to me with all heaven in your eyes.

XLIII

Leeds, October 6, 1905.

OF course your letter has been a terrible shock to me ; if I described how great a shock, you would think I am trying to excite your compassion ; but I have no intention of doing that ; besides, I know that you have given me your pity, even in fuller measure than before, since you wrote the words. I received your letter yesterday afternoon ; I have tasted no food since, nor have I slept ; and I have destroyed I know not how many letters to you. Now I am somewhat calmer. Yet I do not ask you for a moment to unsay what you have said, or to reconsider your decision. I am not inconsistent, and I always realized that it was possible that at any moment you might decide thus ; indeed I have often wondered at your incredible patience and tenderness

with me. I confess I do not quite see what has altered your mind so. Yes, even as I write, it dawns upon me, though I did not think that this was in your mind when we met.

So we are to meet no more, hold no further communication ! It is as though the ground had opened at my feet in a frightful abyss. I had thought I could have kept you as a friend ! It would have spared me much pain, if you could have decided thus earlier ; but I do not for a moment impugn the absolute justice of your decision. Of course at intervals, in my dreadful vigil, a ghastly thought has come near and looked me in the face ; a thought that I may have thrown away lightly the best and most beautiful thing in the world. But, going through the stages of our friendship, I do not see that I could at any point have acted otherwise. You do not quite understand that I have been the prey of two contrary, vehement, irreconcilable emotions ; you have never really believed in the strength of my sense of vocation. I do not think that

a woman can know the vehemence of the artistic impulse. A woman is too unselfish, too tender, too gentle, too pure-minded. She instinctively regards the pursuit of art as the pursuit of any other profession ; and it seems as unreal for a man to say to her that the artistic emotion renders marriage impossible, as if he said that his devotion to a banking business did not allow him to entertain thoughts of matrimony ; but God knows I do not blame you for that ; one can never feel through the imagination what another feels by instinct, however passionately one tries.

But I will say frankly that I did not expect this catastrophe. I feel like a man who hurries home, full of love for those whom he has left behind, after a toilsome journey, and finds his house a mass of smoking ruins. The whole of my life and thought has based itself upon you. You will say that this is fantastic, when I might have claimed you. Oh, the weary circle of argument in which I have gone round and round during this awful night like a

hunted creature. But I have no shadow of resentment in my mind, no sense of injustice; it is my fault, my own great fault; and yet again I do not blame myself any more than I blame you. And now what is left but to gather up the fragments that remain, to piece the broken life together? You will say, as you will have the right to say, that I had better fall back on my artistic vocation; and indeed my only hope of comfort is that the art, which I have only half-heartedly followed hitherto, may be shining in untroubled beauty, like the moon behind the rolling cloud; but the cloud, the cloud! I will no longer think or speak of myself. I know how much your decision will have cost you, a decision so unlike your serene and gracious ways. I know that no pettiness, no vexation, no pride, no mortification has entered into the question with you. I do not fully know what it was in my last letter that precipitated the decision. But I suppose that it was but the last drop of the solution that turns the seeming fluid mass to a crystal.

I know that you will be suffering, though not as I suffer, tortured with stings of anguish, with futile questionings, with bitter retrospects. You will suffer largely, wisely, calmly, even as you love and live. And thus, knowing as I do, it does not even occur to me to ask you to change your mind.

"Oh, well for him whose will is strong ;
He suffers, but he does not suffer long."

The change will not spoil or poison your life ; you will live as you have lived, in your serene activities.

I can fancy you now, going in and out, passing through the house to the garden, talking to your friends, doing your daily business. You will be sad, because you will know that I am suffering, and that in a sense it is your hand that has made me suffer. But your sadness is a grave and tranquil sadness, with nothing fretful, nothing feverish about it. You slept, I doubt not, last night, with the fragrant air stirring in the curtain, as quietly as you ever sleep.

Well, dear, I accept your decision. I do

not question it, I do not ask you to reconsider it. You will try just to send me a few words of comfort and help if you can. I will reply once more; and then I will say no further word. The best and brightest blessings attend you. I hope with all my heart that you will put me out of your mind, that you will form other ties, the best, the closest. You need to love and to be loved; you should be, you will be, a joyful mother of children. Yet I cannot help daring to hope that you will keep a tiny corner in your heart for your unhappy and unworthy friend; and that you will visit it sometimes, in a twilight hour, it may be with a sigh—for I shall think of you, and long for you, and love you until death,—and perhaps beyond. God bless you, dear!

XLIV

4, Russell Road, Leeds,

October 9, 1905.

YOUR letter is like your brave self; and now that this is the last time that I shall ever write a word to you, I pray that what I say may be distilled as honey from flowers, that it may be fragrant and sweet; dying like music to a soft close. I want you to have none but peaceful and tender thoughts of me; that the clouds may break in blessings on your head.

Do you remember the day of summer when I saw you first? I had seen your face across the table at that big luncheon party. I did not know your name, but I trusted you from that moment. Then afterwards we had a few turns up and down the great garden; you stopped, I remember, by the great syringa-bush to draw in its

sweetness. It was like you not to shrink, as some would have done, from the over-weening fragrance of the white flowers ; and I have loved the syringa ever since for your sake. Then there was the lime-tree, musical with bees ; and you plucked a flower from it, and said, do you remember, that it was strange that the tree should smell so sweet, when the single flower had so bitter and herb-like a smell ? We talked of trivial things, but in that hour my shrinking spirit leant upon yours, knew your strength and virtue, drew courage from the contact ; and then our friendship opened like a flower ; till the day came when that other impulse rose up in my life, and grappled fiercely with my love ; and then I knew that I had tempted my fate too much ; but even so I hoped to save what had become so inexpressibly dear to me. Well, it was not to be—I did my best, you did your best ; but your best was far, far better than mine, because you strove to do out of mercy and lovingkindness what your instinct could not let you do.

